

Brill's Companion to the Reception of Classics in International Modernism
and the Avant-Garde

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Brill's Companion to the Reception of Classics in International Modernism and the Avant-Garde

Edited by

Adam J. Goldwyn and James Nikopoulos



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Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
Notes on the Editors	VIII
Notes on the Contributors	IX

Introduction: Modernist Studies at the Crossroads of Classical Reception, Seferis Reads Eliot and Cavafy	1
<i>Adam J. Goldwyn and James Nikopoulos</i>	

1 The Female Colossus in the New World: Innovations on a Classical Motif in José Martí's <i>Modernismo</i>	19
<i>Tyler Fisher and Jenni Lehtinen</i>	
2 Educating the "Perfect Imagist": Greek Literature and Classical Scholarship in the Poetry of H. D.	38
<i>Bryan Brinkman and Bartholomew Brinkman</i>	
3 Creating the Modern Rhapsode: The Classics as World Literature in Ezra Pound's <i>Cantos</i>	53
<i>Adam J. Goldwyn</i>	
4 From Ithaca to Magna Graecia, Icaria and Hyperborea – Some Aspects of the Classical Tradition in the Serbian Avant-Garde	73
<i>Bojan Jović</i>	
5 Gods, Heroes, and Myths: The Use of Classical Imagery in Spanish Avant-Garde Prose	106
<i>Juan Herrero-Senés</i>	
6 The Classical Ideal in Fernando Pessoa	123
<i>Kenneth David Jackson</i>	
7 "Ulysses' Island": <i>Nóstos</i> as Exile in Salvatore Quasimodo's Poetry	142
<i>Ernesto Livorni</i>	
8 Jean Cocteau, <i>Orphée</i> , and the Shock of the Old	160
<i>David Hammerbeck</i>	

- 9 **The Classical Past and ‘The History of Ourselves’: Laura Riding’s Trojan Woman** 182
 Anett Jessop
- 10 **Platonic Eros and “Soul-Leading” in C. S. Lewis** 199
 Samuel Baker
- 11 **The Heideggerian Origins of a Post-Platonist Plato** 220
 William H. F. Altman
- 12 **Albert Camus’ Hellenic Heart, between Saint Augustine and Hegel** 242
 Matthew Sharpe
- 13 **A Modernist Poet Alludes to an Ancient Historian: George Seferis and Thucydides** 269
 Polina Tambakaki
- 14 **The Wisdom of Myth: Eliot’s “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”** 292
 James Nikopoulos
- Index** 313

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Introduction: Modernist Studies at the Crossroads of Classical Reception, Seferis Reads Eliot and Cavafy

Adam J. Goldwyn and James Nikopoulos

On December 17, 1946 the future Nobel laureate George Seferis (1900–1971) delivered a lecture at the British Institute in Athens. The talk focused on two poets already appraised as central to their respective languages' avant-gardes, but about whom little had been said in comparison. Today, when we talk about modern poetry, it does not seem so strange to discuss T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) and C. P. Cavafy (1863–1933) together – despite the glaring dissimilarities in their careers: The former was the lynchpin of modern literature, whose poetry and criticism helped shape, perhaps more than any other's, the dominant ideas of what would become the century's most dominant literary aesthetic. The latter? – a peripheral figure whose work did not receive much attention during his lifetime. The former lived in London and wrote in English, while the latter spent his life in Alexandria, Egypt and wrote in Greek. In other words, the one worked from the global capital of the largest empire the world had ever seen and in the world's most influential language, while the other wrote from the colonized margins of that empire, in a language whose heyday of influence had long since faded. What, then, could T. S. Eliot and C. P. Cavafy truly have in common?

According to Seferis, the answer is “history.” But what he means has little to do with circumstances. Rather, Seferis argues that both poets had a certain “way of using time,” a sensibility regarding history which shaped each poet's work similarly.¹ It is a counterintuitive thesis to anyone familiar with these two very different artists, since each seems to incorporate the past into his poetry in very distinct ways – Eliot by inserting fragments from the Western literary tradition into modernist epics like *The Waste Land*, Cavafy, by invoking unremembered pasts in the anonymous voices of his unassuming lyrics. If Eliot was known for reestablishing a literary canon, and for asserting his own work's place therein, Cavafy made his claims by giving voice to the forgotten and the sidelined. Seferis acknowledges these distinctions, but he contends that Cavafy's and Eliot's work share a formative principle regarding history that accounts for their poetry's similarities as much as its differences. Seferis calls

¹ Seferis (1966), 136.

this “a feeling of temporal identification” – the feeling that “past and present are united and with them, perhaps, the future as well.”²

In pairing such unlikely bedfellows, and in doing so through the topic of history, Seferis’ essay encapsulates the many tensions that underlie Classical reception in the modernist period. Seferis is essentially arguing that the “temporal identification” that unites time present with time past and future is an important part of what defines modernist poetics as a whole. To an extent, this idea is now taken for granted. As a recent study on modernism claims, “This tension between tradition and the apparent chaos of ‘contemporary history’ structures much of our thinking about art and literature in the twentieth century.”³ And indeed one of the principal reasons for why this assertion is now a truism can be attributed to Eliot’s impact on world letters. As far back as his 1919 essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot was arguing for the reciprocal nature of artistic influence. His 1923 review of the iconic work of both modernism and modernist Classical reception, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” singled out James Joyce’s use of Homeric allusion, and in the process defined modernism’s “contemporary history” as a period of “futility and anarchy,” which could only be made sense of by translating one’s cultural inheritance into a present tense.⁴ The topic of history, then, is not just of foremost importance to a volume focusing on modernism and the classical heritage. It is central to any discussion of what constitutes modernism in the first place, and it has been since modernists first began their meandering attempts to situate their artistic production within the broader context of world history.

Indeed, this tension between contemporary history and the legacy of the past continues to shape our understanding of modernism. Some of the most vituperative debates in humanistic study of the last fifty years have revolved around the question of what constitutes a culture’s valid inheritance. In the field of literature, much of this is once again indebted to the influence of modernism and of T. S. Eliot in particular. By the mid-twentieth century, modernism had become so entrenched in Anglo-American academia as a paragon of literary worth, and Eliot’s position therein so centrally established, that the coterie of mostly American and European artists associated with Eliot had come to dominate the modern canon. But it is not just that history had deemed Eliot et al. most worthy of posterity. It is that artists like Eliot had themselves deemed modernist aesthetics most capable of transcribing their times for posterity. The argument went that only a form of art which dramatized the “futile”

2 Seferis (1966), 132.

3 Latham and Rogers (2015), 6.

4 Eliot (1975b), 177.

and “anarchic” nature of early twentieth-century history was truly of its time, and therefore truly modern (and thus potentially modernist). Modernism got defined not just as a period, but as Eric Hayot has argued, as an “attitude.”⁵ The result of such snobbery, write Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, is that “to this day, no other name for a field of cultural production evokes quite the constellation of negativity, risk of aesthetic failure, and bad behavior that ‘modernism’ does.”⁶

But much has changed. Back in 2006 Mao and Walkowitz were at the vanguard of efforts to reconsider modernism’s legacy. Their work helped to inaugurate the “new” modernist studies, a movement which has been so successful that today the entire field is in a sense still “new.” It is a movement which has expanded our conceptual understanding of what modernist art was and when it appeared, and in the process opened up modernist studies to new critical perspectives. Scholars no longer feel relegated to ignore historical factors or to keep to certain sanctioned methodologies. In recent years critics have analyzed modernism in light of popular culture, as well as technological and scientific advancements; they have reassessed our preconceptions of the period with postcolonial and queer theory, and they have turned modernist criticism into a truly worldwide examination. Once exemplified by only a few names who mostly worked in western Europe and the United States, modernism is now considered a global phenomenon. As a result, our periodization continues to change. Today, it is not just unclear whether modernism began in 1913 or 1857, or whether modernism ended after World War II or not, but whom such bookends center or marginalize, promote or silence.⁷

5 Hayot (2012), 150.

6 Mao and Walkowitz (2006), 4.

7 In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Virginia Woolf famously claimed that “On or about December 1910 human character changed.” Woolf (1924), 746. This essay is now a staple of modernist theory, but it did less to finalize our efforts at periodization than incite greater speculation. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s influential 1978 anthology of modernist literature begins in 1890. Back in 1931, Edmund Wilson’s classic study, *Axel’s Castle*, linked modernism to French symbolism, and in doing so, pushed modernism’s start date back to 1870. Today, things are far from resolved. Jean-Michel Rabaté offers 1913 as a fundamental starting place for modernism. Meanwhile a website like Yale’s modernism lab chooses to begin its focus a year later, even though its director, Pericles Lewis, begins his *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* in 1900 – though the first chapter focuses on Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*, from 1857 (Peter Gay also begins his 2008 book on modernism with Baudelaire). The great irony of all this, as Eric Hayot has pointed out, is that the first mention of the word modernism came in 1888, when Rubén Darío used the term *modernismo* in his review of the work of Ricardo Contreras; Hayot (2012), 151. (To further complicate things, even Darío’s position as initiator

Thus, while Eliot and his high modernist brethren have certainly not been forgotten, profound shifts in the study of their legacies have turned them into figureheads for an older way of doing things. The vagaries of modernism's reception are, in many ways, reflected in Eliot's own legacy. Once considered bastions of artistic innovation, both Eliot in particular and modernism in general would become synonymous with outmoded exclusivity. Suddenly such high modernist classics as *The Waste Land*, not to mention even more challenging tomes like *Ulysses* or Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, seemed as much avant-garde tours de force as opportunities for highly educated western men to display their impenetrable erudition.

Cavafy's reception, however, has moved in a different direction. Mostly unknown in his lifetime, Cavafy has since become, according to America's most distinguished society of verse, the "most distinguished Greek poet of the twentieth century."⁸ Just thirty years ago and such a statement would have probably surprised most Greek speakers, for whom someone like Yiannis Ritsos, or one of Greece's two Nobel laureates, Seferis or Odysseus Elytis, would have seemed more apt nominees. Even more astounding is Cavafy's stature within world letters. In the last two decades, translations and academic studies of his work have proliferated at a breakneck pace. UNESCO commemorated the 150th anniversary of his birth by declaring 2013 the "Cavafy year," hosting events in his honor everywhere from Chile to Kazakhstan.⁹ In the United States, symposia organized in his name brought together classicists and writers alike – The PEN

of Latin American *modernismo* is debated. See for example, Fisher and Lehtinen's chapter in this volume.)

The field of modernist studies is fully aware of these contradictions. Any of the volumes cited in this introduction discuss them. A particularly good starting place, though, is Latham and Rogers' *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea*.

Whether or not we should identify a mid-twentieth-century end to modernism, so as to make way for post-modernism, is just as contentious. Recent explorations of this topic include two entries from Eysteinnsson and Liska's voluminous undertaking: Barrett Watten's "Modernism at the Crossroads. Types of Negativity," and Sam Slote's "Thoroughly Modern Modernism, Modernism and its Postmodernisms."

8 "C. P. Cavafy," Poetry Foundation.org, accessed 27 May 2016.

9 Sandra Marinopoulos, "Cavafy's 'Figures' Loved and Idealized," The Huffington Post, updated March 24, 2014. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sandra-marinopoulos/cavafys-figures-loved-and_b_4637297.html> See also The Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO. <http://www.unesco-hellas.gr/en/years_of_kavafi.html> Accessed June 1, 2016. As for the celebration in Kazakhstan, this event was co-hosted by James Nikopoulos' university in Astana, in conjunction with the Greek embassy.

America Center's New York tribute even included Nobel Prize winning novelist Orhan Pamuk.¹⁰

Cavafy's current reputation must be considered in light of the recent global turn in criticism – to which the new modernist studies have made a significant contribution. That a poet who produced only a small body of work written in a language the West had long since ossified into a “dead” idiom is now a giant of modern poetry, is testament to the sea change that literary studies have undergone. But Cavafy's work is paradigmatic of the “new” in academia in more ways than one. He is not just a once minor writer of a minor language from a once overlooked corner of the modern republic of letters. He was also a gay man who composed breathtaking and unabashed encomiums to homoerotic desire. Factor all this together and Cavafy suddenly seems paradigmatic of the many neglected corners of human experience that modern cultural criticism seeks to highlight. “Cavafy's world exists in the twilight zones,” writes Seferis, “in the borderlands of those places, individuals and epochs which he so painstakingly identifies.”¹¹ This is as true of his “much publicized eroticism” as of the anonymous individuals and eras that litter his historical poems “as though fallen from time's saddlebags.”¹² Cavafy's panorama is the landscape of contemporary criticism – hell bent on examining from up close what was once confined to the farthest reaches.

The history of Cavafy's reception is paradigmatic not just of our changing perspectives on modern poetry, but on Greek as a language of poetry. Cavafy does not just “use time” by alluding to history, but by using the history of his language in his verse. Cavafy's Greek is anything but typical. At certain moments quotidian, at others shimmeringly formal, Cavafy's poetry aimed to make full use of his idiom's potential, which included incorporating *katharevousa*, the controversial language invented to align modern Greek more closely with its ancient Attic predecessor. When Seferis writes that Cavafy's sensibility is expressed by the same kind of historical sense as Eliot's, the kind that is “temporary” and “simultaneous,” he is not just talking about Cavafy's use of historical allusion.¹³ He is talking about the way Cavafy's poetry presents a portrait of a continuous Greek language, one that is no longer either “ancient”

10 See “A Tribute to C. P. Cavafy,” Pen America, accessed 1 June 2016 <<http://pen.org/event/2013/10/09/tribute-cp-cavafy>>

11 Seferis (1966), 152.

12 Seferis (1966), 152.

13 Seferis (1966), 153.

or “modern,” no longer resigned to a glorious past or an obscure present, but that is simply present in the fullness of its complete past.¹⁴

Which is why Seferis’ essay is as relevant to a discussion on the changing face of modernist studies as to the other field represented in this volume – classical reception. Nothing has done more in recent years to shake up the academic study of the Greek and Roman classics than reception studies. Charles Martindale has made this argument convincingly. He writes that when he began his doctorate at Oxford in 1968, “Latin poetry ended with Juvenal, philosophy was confined to Plato and Aristotle, [and] history largely kept within two periods (classical Greece and late Republican and early Imperial Rome).”¹⁵ Not so anymore. It is not uncommon now to find everything from Byzantine history to modern Greek verse taught by Classicists, and a field that once labored exclusively with philological methodologies might today have recourse to everything from gender studies to performance history. Another way of putting it is that classical reception has done to Classics what the “new” modernist studies did to its field.¹⁶ What once counted as the classics and how one should go about assessing them are now being actively redefined.

The consequences of this “democratic turn,” are profound.¹⁷ Reception studies impels us to interrogate our assumptions about what we simultaneously dismiss and revere with a term like “classic” – Are these texts as independent from our world as we thought? Are they as independent from the systems of values future readers imbued them with before passing them along to us? One could argue, says Martindale, that “Classics is necessarily a dialogue of ancient and modern, transhistorically. There is a sense that this is what the very name of [the] discipline means.”¹⁸ So is this the same “feeling of temporal identification” that Seferis located in Eliot and Cavafy? An emphasis on reception turns the study of the classics into an examination of the ways artists align the past with the present and thereby rewrite that past and influence its futures.

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot famously wrote that tradition is not something an artist inherits. It is something he or she must work to

14 For example, see Constantine et al. (2009), the ambitious anthology that presents Greek poetry as one continuous 2,800 year history.

15 See Martindale (2013), 169–70.

16 See, for instance, Stuart Gillespie’s assertion that reception has become so normalized within Classics that “we are becoming used to reception moving towards the forefront of the study of ancient literatures,” as evidenced, in his view, by the emphasis on reception in the recent Cambridge Companions on ancient authors. Gillespie (2011), 1.

17 Hardwick and Stray (2008), 3.

18 Martindale (2013), 177.

acquire, and only by paying heed to what Eliot calls “the historical sense,” the perception “not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.”¹⁹ Which is essentially what Cavafy is dramatizing in a poem like “Those Who Fought for the Achaean League” (at least so argues Seferis):

Υπέρ της Αχαιϊκής Συμπολιτείας πολεμήσαντες

Ανδρείοι σεις που πολεμήσατε και πέσατ' ευκλεώς·
τους πανταχού νικήσαντας μη φοβηθέντες.
Ἄμωμοι σεις, αν έπταισαν ο Δίαιος κι ο Κριτόλαος.
Ὅταν θα θέλουν οι Ἕλληνες να καυχηθούν,
«Τέτοιους βγάζει το έθνος μας» θα λένε
για σας. Έτσι θαυμάσιος θάναι ο έπαινός σας. –

Εγράφη εν Αλεξανδρεία υπό Αχαιού·
έβδομον έτος Πτολεμαίου, Λαθύρου.²⁰

[Valiant are you who fought and fell in glory;
fearless of those who were everywhere victorious.
If Diaios and Critolaus were at fault, you are blameless.
When the Greeks want to boast,
“Our nation turns out such men as these,” they will say
of you. So marvelous will be your praise –

Written in Alexandria by an Achaean;
In the seventh year of Ptolemy Lathyrus.]²¹

“Those Who Fought for the Achaean League” is the first poem that reminded Seferis of Eliot’s use of history. Like most of Cavafy’s output, it is a work of layered subtlety, whose deeply personal sentiments emerge only after a bit of excavation. The poem lauds the last generals of a confederation of Greek city-states formed to fight off Roman advance. When the league fell in 146 BCE, so did resistance to Roman conquest. The poem’s culminating lines attribute this encomium to an imaginary Achaean writing in 109 BCE, the seventh year of the reign of Ptolemy Lathyrus, a period of Hellenistic Egypt Seferis describes as one of “humiliation, decadence and never-ending intrigue, which

19 Eliot (1975a), 38.

20 Cavafy (1963), 37.

21 This is Rae Dalven’s translation, cited from the English-language edition of Seferis (1966). See Seferis (1966), 125–6.

culminated in the flight of Ptolemy from Alexandria.”²² Thus, what we have here is a lament of the Greeks’ loss of the Peloponnesus, attributed to someone living in the years immediately preceding the Greek loss of Egypt, dramatized by a short lyric, which was penned by a Greek Egyptian in 1922. As Seferis reminds us, this is no inconsequential moment in Greek history. It is the year in which a botched military campaign against Turkey led to a systematic population exchange, forcing all Turks in Greece and all Greeks in Turkey into a state of permanent exile. As a result, some two thousand years of Greek presence in Asia Minor suddenly and quickly came to an end.²³

“By alluding, almost imperceptibly, to the fault of Diaios and Critolaus and then to the seventh year of Ptolemy Lathyrus,” writes Seferis, “Cavafy is able to identify the past with the present in a simultaneous moment.”²⁴ As a result, the writer of this anonymous epigram, “in this seventh year of any Ptolemy Lathyrus, is Cavafy, is the nameless Achaean, is both of them together.”²⁵ Within this poem then, Seferis locates a strategy of artistic innovation, one which operates under the assumption that history is something fundamentally dialogical and complementary. Seferis spies a similar assumption at work in Eliot’s use of the dead god in *The Waste Land* – a supposition, suddenly taken as necessary, that it is how one receives the past in his present which determines one’s modernity.

To an extent, modernism has always operated according to this principle of history. By its very definition, any avant-garde – including those we give the name of “modernism” to – is a reaction to what dominated its culture’s immediate past. Today we more often classify “modernism” and “the avant-garde” together rather than separately, even if contemporary criticism oftentimes speaks of “modernisms” and “avant-gardes” in the plural. For despite their many real differences, both high modernism and the avant-garde bring the past into the present and thereby project their modernity back onto history. Eliot called for such a move explicitly in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” His own poetry, along with many other modernist temples, implicitly ask us to consider their innovations as part of a continuous tradition. As Louis Menand pithily declares, the “It” in Pound’s “Make It New” is the Old.”²⁶

22 Seferis (1966), 130.

23 The Asia Minor “Catastrophe” held particular resonance for Seferis, who was born in Smyrna (modern-day Izmir).

24 Seferis (1966), 131.

25 Seferis (1966), 131.

26 Menand (2009).

Is it so different with other avant-gardes? In his Futurist manifesto of 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti did not tell us to “make” it new; he told us to destroy the old. If modernism asked for continuity, the avant-garde demanded rupture – or so the argument went. However, a call for destruction within art is not the same thing as within life.²⁷ What an avant-garde calls for is not erasure but perpetual erasure. In Marinetti’s call to the future, references to the past abound. As the fourth point of his manifesto loudly proclaims:

Nous déclarons que la splendeur du monde s’est enrichie d’une beauté nouvelle: la beauté de la vitesse. Une automobile de course avec son coffre orné de gros tuyaux tels des serpents à l’haleine explosive . . . une automobile rugissante, qui a l’air de courir sur de la mitraille, est plus belle que la Victoire de Samothrace.

[We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car with a hood that glistens with large pipes resembling a serpent with explosive breath . . . a roaring automobile that seems to ride on grapeshot – that is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.]²⁸

Thus even when Marinetti writes a poem in praise of his fast car, the best metaphor he can find for conveying its speed is a figure from Classical mythology: “My Pegasus,” he calls it.²⁹

The incessant desire in Futurist writings to burn down museums, libraries and other places of antiquarian interest and replace them with electric plants and railway stations similarly points to the paradoxical need of even

27 The very real political influence that Futurism had makes this statement an oversimplification. On the one hand, Futurist artists did actively promote breaks with the past. On the other, Futurist ideology influenced a culture of fascism which kept the classical heritage very much within the public eye. For more see Conversi (2009), 92–117. A more substantial discussion can be found in Poggi (2009).

28 Marinetti (1909), 51.

29 Rainey et al. (2009), 425; for a brief analysis, see 410. The Futurist painter Umberto Boccioni’s 1910 “La città che sale” (“The City Rises”) also features a Pegasus, about which Rainey et al. note that “the ‘pegasus’ that dominates the center of this painting has surprised many commentators by its apparent anachronism: Why would a Futurist use a traditional symbol, rather than a machine, to represent power?” They answer that Pegasus was a suitable referent for a car, since Futurists saw them “as a vehicle for acquiring ego-expanding powers of speed and flight. The machine assumes a quasi-organic, vitalist force” along the lines of the mythological flying horse. Rainey et al. (2009), 309.

the most anti-traditional branch of the avant-garde to engage with the past in order to understand its place in the present. Ultimately, the Classical past is not so much wiped away but continuously alluded to from within the present tense of the artwork's reception. By proclaiming the absence of the classics, the avant-garde implicates their presence. In defining itself in opposition to its classical predecessors, in demanding their obsolescence, the avant-garde inadvertently reaffirms their canonization.

If the classics have always been present within modernism and the avant-garde, then it bears asking what makes modernist innovation so different from that of previous artistic revolutions. Anne E. Fernald has argued that the "technological and epistemological changes" that affected modernism's understanding of contemporary history also distinguished modernism's treatment of tradition from those of its predecessors. With modernism, the "judgments of the past became self-consciously contingent and individual."³⁰ Another way of putting it is that the historical sensibility of modernism is fundamentally anti-Classical. By definition the "Classics" are not just statements from the past, but statements from a communally sanctioned past. They are the representatives of an inheritance that is supposed to transcend the whims of individual and epochal tastes. When modernists like Eliot deem their aesthetic to be the only one capable of representing "contemporary history," they are in essence deeming contemporary history incommensurable with the communal values its "classics" have passed on to them. "To be modern is not to dismiss the classics as false or overrated," writes Christopher S. Wood, "but to see them as paths to truth that can no longer be retraced."³¹ Even Eliot, who lamented the fragmentation of tradition and who sought to rectify the loss of a common cultural denominator, contributed directly to the anti-Classical sensibility of modernist reception. No artist who considers "contemporary history" to be so completely unique can bring the classics into the present without severing them from what was so essential about their past.

In other words, modernity is what historicized "the classics." What were once timeless and continuous, and thus merely earlier points on a timeline that included us, have now become distinct Others to our modern selves. Gregory Jusdanis has recently made such an argument, citing the German classical archaeologist Nikolaus Himmelmann, who first claimed that modernity "created antiquity as a completely different society, a non-Christian alternative to itself."³² Apparently modern archaeology is very much to blame for this.

³⁰ Fernald (2007), 157.

³¹ Wood (2012), 168.

³² Jusdanis (2004), 46.

Before the archaeologists got ahold of them, our temples betrayed their two-thousand-year histories by forming part of the landscape rather than by being deviations from it. The Roman Colosseum was overgrown with plant life and the Athenian Acropolis a palimpsest of the citadels and storehouses that had been built atop it. Now they are pristine sites, covered in scaffolding and off limits to all without an entrance ticket, as distinct from the modern world as they are from their ancient contexts.³³ Modernism, argues Jurdanis, reacted against this “calcification of classicism.”³⁴ A poet like Cavafy presents an alternative image of Greek culture, an image of continuity, whose ancient history is as contemporary as his revolutionary present is historic.

Is art, then, what saved our classics from the scientific study of the classical world, and therefore, from irrelevance? One could make an opposing argument just as easily, that the scientific study of antiquity – whether it be archaeology or philology or anthropology – allowed art to make the classics modern again. If the early twentieth century truly was a period of “futility and anarchy,” whose “technological and epistemological changes” led to a crisis of faith in the structures that formed its systems of value, then why can’t a science like archaeology contribute to this crisis? As Karl Popper famously argued, by definition science presents its truths as contingencies that are rewritten when new information becomes available.³⁵ By turning antiquity into an object of study for science, by learning more about our pasts, do we not realize just how wrong we have been about those pasts, as well as just how much more there is left to learn? Perhaps archaeology only reaffirms our modernity’s very suspicions, those that lead us to wonder whether all our inherited narratives are at all accurate – and whether the present narratives we are weaving will prove as inevitably false as well.

What is certain is that debates regarding the concept of “reception” have always played a role in our discussions of modernity – in a similar way that they have informed our understanding of what constitutes the “classics.” Whether we are speaking of Eliot or Cavafy or Sophocles or Homer, we are speaking of artists who take their inheritance and make it contemporary. And

33 We would argue instead, that these sites are still part of the nature of modern-day Rome and Athens. From afar, both seem like exceptions to the smog and noise of our twenty-first century. But when you are maneuvering past the locals in gladiator costumes nearby, demanding a price for a picture, when you are wandering around the Acropolis’ underside in the district of Psiri, these ancient spots blend into the experience of the modern cityscape, and the absurdities of their current circumstances become part of the absurdity of the contemporary world.

34 Jurdanis (2004), 43.

35 See Popper (2002), 43–86.

it has always been this way, as Martindale's gloss on the definition of his discipline argues. However, it has not always been this way either. It is a very different thing when Eliot appropriated Ovid than when Shakespeare did. And it is very different for a modern to use Homer and not some arcane bit of forgotten history à la Cavafy. In a similar way, it is very different when Eliot alludes to a Greek than when he does to the *Bhagavad Gita*. When we refer to the "Classics" we refer specifically to a canon of Western texts that the intellectual, artistic and, indeed, political elite of the Western world has selected, sanctioned, and re-sanctioned as fundamental to its culture over the course of its history. When we speak of the Greek and Roman classics we allude to a history of genealogy and influence; we implicate a legacy of social capital that is irretrievably interwoven into the history of Western cultural and political influence around the globe. Homer, for example, is no longer a figure of the West alone, nor has he been for quite some time.³⁶ The fact that medieval portraits of Homer can be found in Arabic as well as Greek and Italian manuscripts in the Middle Ages and that we find his traces in contemporary Caribbean and Korean literature has as much to do with the central place Western culture has occupied in the world as with the nuance and sophistication of Homeric narrative.³⁷

The argument we are making with this volume – and which Seferis' essay exemplifies – is twofold. For one, classical reception has always been as fundamental to modernist identity as it has to the identity of the classics themselves. Two, our contemporary reception of the Classics must be understood as shaped in large part by our contemporary reception of modernists like Eliot and Cavafy. However, an analysis that operates under this assumption need not run roughshod over the distinctions either – in the same way that a volume that contributes to the dynamics of classical reception and modernist studies as they are practiced today need not be afraid of acknowledging the hazards its assumptions present. These are hazards that have been catalogued by many and which are linked, once again, to the global and democratic turns in academic criticism. In expanding the parameters of Classics as a discipline, do we not run the risk of losing the discipline's focus, as well as its communality and

36 See for example, Graziosi and Greenwood (2007) as well as Goldwyn (2015).

37 For medieval portraits of Homer, see Graziosi (2015); for visual depictions of Ancient Greek mythological and historical figures in contemporary Chinese painting, see "Discussing *The Divine Comedy* with Dante" (2006) and for the Trojan War and Greek mythology more generally, see the works of the Korean-born American painter Younghee-Choi Martin. Derek Walcott's *Omeros* is the most famous adaptation of the *Odyssey* in a Caribbean idiom, but the poem's influence on African-American visual culture can also be seen in the work of Romare Bearden.

traditional skills?³⁸ What about what has happened with modernism? Have our recent attempts “to understand its imbrication in the social, material, and economic structures of a globally conceived modernity” turned modernism into “an ingrained yet somehow weightless concept”?³⁹

The answers to these questions are always the same: Maybe. The threat that with increased inclusion comes increased ambiguity is very real. At the same time, one hopes that with more quality scholarship also come more lucid – if albeit more complicated – theoretical elaborations. We for one hope that this volume will help to clarify how modernism fits within world literature, how classical reception contributes to modernism’s place therein, and how the enduring influence of modernist Classical reception continues to shape contemporary views of Classical literature, even if there are gaping lacunae in our project. No single volume can accurately represent the state of a single field, let alone the intersection of two, as ours is attempting to do. Despite our ambitions, the subjects and geographical areas represented here are all-too-limited and still Euro-centric. And while the volume’s title implies a study of all modernist and avant-garde art, we have chosen to concentrate on literary production. We have done so in order to keep the project’s scope manageable, and in light of the editors’ and contributors’ own specialities. In our defense of these decisions, we can only admit that intentions cannot always triumph over logistics.

As one more “companion” in Brill’s series on classical reception, the duty of this volume is to attempt to represent a current state of affairs. This inevitably involves giving voice to the “new” in such a way that does not lose sight of the “old” – without which the “new” lacks context. Thus, we have included contributions on lesser-discussed “modernists” as well as on canonical fixtures; we have sought studies that highlight the discrepancies that arise when one form of classical reception takes precedence over others, as well as the assumptions that inform why one form of reception would ever become more paradigmatic than another.

We begin the volume with Tyler Fisher and Jenni Lehtinen’s chapter on Cuban poet José Martí (1853–1895). Their study expands our awareness of the ways European modernism’s preoccupation with nationhood is prefigured in Latin American *modernismo*. By examining Martí’s use of the colossus image, their work places classical reception at the center of how we define the

38 Martindale (2013), 176. In addition, one need only look at the recent proliferation of undergraduate programs in the ancient world or graduate programs in Classical Receptions itself, both of which give students mediated access to the ancient world and its literatures through translation but most often without the study of Greek and Latin, not to mention the traditional philological skills of paleography and textual editing.

39 Latham and Rogers (2015), 2.

limits of modernism's origins. This chapter is followed by Bryan Brinkman and Bartholomew Brinkman's discussion of classical scholarship in the writing of the American poet H. D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), which then leads us into Adam Goldwyn's analysis of the global scope of Ezra Pound's epic ambitions. We hope that by leading with H. D., we do not commit the usual fallacy of placing her work within the shadow of her relationship with Pound (1885–1972), or of foregrounding Pound's own well known ideas on the classical tradition and literary innovation. More important though, these chapters demonstrate that the classics were not merely a source from which modernists culled literary references, but a stomping ground upon which to engage in a dialogue concerning the place of literature in an evolving modernity.

That literature could – and in fact, should – play a foundational role in twentieth-century discourses on world history, is evidenced in these opening chapters implicitly, and explicitly in the two that follow. The role modernist poetics played within broader national discourses comes up for scrutiny in the studies by Bojan Jović and Juan Herrero-Senés, respectively. Herrero-Senés focuses on an oft-neglected aspect of the post-war Spanish avant-garde, prose fiction. His essay examines how Spanish novelists used myth to take a stand on contemporary history. Jović considers modernist literature from within the Serbian context and connects the tensions underlying an experimentalist approach to the classics with the Yugoslav situation in the aftermath of World War I.

The volume also looks at modernists whose central place in their respective traditions belies their relative neglect within Anglo-American criticism. Chapters on the poets Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) and Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–1968) question why these names usually only figure in national accounts of the avant-garde. Kenneth David Jackson argues that the Greek and Roman classics form the thread that unifies the many contradictions of the career of Portugal's most important modern poet, Fernando Pessoa. And Ernesto Livorni reviews how the theme of *nóstos* wove itself into the work of Salvatore Quasimodo in particular, and in Italian Hermetic poetry as a whole. Meanwhile, David Hammerbeck looks at the prolific but much-maligned auteur Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), investigating Cocteau's adaptations of the Orpheus myth in light of French modernism's engagement with performance. In Chapter Nine, Anett Jessop looks at the understudied American writer Laura Riding (1901–1999), situating Riding's appropriation of the Trojan War within feminist critical discourse. In doing so, her chapter joins the Brinkmans' in reinforcing classical reception's relevance to feminist critiques of modernism.

The next two chapters redirect our focus towards Plato and the divergent ways artists and philosophers made use of his complicated legacy. Samuel Baker examines beloved children's book author and avowed anti-modernist

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963). His study of Lewis’ transformation of Platonic *eros* into an allegory of Christian longing expands our definitions of a “modernist” account of classical reception. This is then followed by William F. H. Altman’s chapter on the seminal but controversial German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Altman looks at Heidegger’s contribution to the creation of a post-Platonist Plato, a figure for a newly-theorized and rapidly developing modern century. In a different vein, Matthew Sharpe considers fiction and philosophy in his examination of the work of the Algerian-born Frenchman Albert Camus (1913–1960). One of the century’s most influential thinkers, Camus attempted to contextualize and think “au dehors” his modern predicament by persistently “returning to the Greeks.”

The volume then concludes with its own “return” to a certain Greek and to the “historical sense” with which we introduced this project. Polina Tambakaki discusses our old friend Seferis and his career-long engagement with Thucydides. Athens’ foremost historian helped the poet to connect an inchoate identity of modern Greek citizenship to an anti-traditional century and its two-thousand-plus year past. The volume concludes with James Nikopoulos’ close reading of Eliot’s overly-discussed essay on the allusiveness of contemporaneity, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth.” That is to say, we end by reconsidering what is for many the classic starting point for modernist classical reception.

We hope that this book provides a glimpse in the direction of what a dialectical understanding of classical reception entails. The present rewrites the past, as much as it is enacted through the past. We find this again and again, from avant-garde to avant-garde, a conception of artistic revolution based on the belief that one has the right and the duty to actively acquire his inheritance. The most famous version of this statement is still Eliot’s. “Some can absorb knowledge,” he writes in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” “the more tardy must sweat for it.”⁴⁰ Perhaps this explains why modernism occupied itself so vociferously with its pasts. Perhaps modernism understood its time to be a belated one, and thus, believed that it needed to labor for its innovations. Today, literary criticism is attempting to do the same. Both classical reception and the new modernist studies are attempting through hard work to make up for their disciplines’ prior lethargy, by refusing to take for granted what their predecessors once did – our classics can only be considered birthrights after we have begun exercising our right to question them.

How un-modern then, what Seferis had to say on the topic of inheritance. Seferis agreed with Eliot that an artist needs to work to acquire a tradition – but only if that person comes from a rootless place [...] like St. Louis! (poor

40 Eliot (1975a), 40.

Eliot). Whereas someone like Cavafy, writes Seferis, could take his bequeathment for granted. After all, “He comes from one of the intellectual capitals of the world which, though almost submerged, is still great and can boast of being ‘Greek from ages past.’”⁴¹ How un-modern then, this idea of inheritance Seferis ascribes to Cavafy, our epitome of modern poetry. Perhaps Eliot is not as stodgy as we once sought, for even he understood that innovation has less to do with the amount of cultural capital one is bequeathed as with the amount invested in interrogating the allotment. In the end, even Eliot felt he had inherited something of the ancient Greeks and Romans; even Cavafy felt he had to sweat to acquire his Hellenism. The process of creating one’s modernity is akin to the process of affirming one’s classics. Neither procedure is static. For as anyone knows who has ever suffered at the hands of another’s haughty dismissal of his culture, one man’s novelty is always another’s old news, the way one man’s classics are just as easily another’s albatross.

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41 Seferis (1966), 155.

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The Female Colossus in the New World: Innovations on a Classical Motif in José Martí's *Modernismo*

Tyler Fisher and Jenni Lehtinen

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, [...]
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman

EMMA LAZARUS "The New Colossus," 1883



While living in exile in Spain, José Martí (1853–1895) wrote poems in support of Cuban independence from Spain. His writings for the cause had brought about his initial arrest and exile from Cuba in the first place, but he continued undeterred, in verse and prose, penning critiques of the colonial regime and elegies for revolutionaries.¹ One of these early poems takes up a Classical motif – that of the country-as-colossus – in a remarkably innovative depiction. The culminating lines of the poem titled “Venid! Venid; – mi sangre bullidora” [Come, Come! My Boiling Blood (October 1871)], which survives in the first of Martí’s expatriate notebooks, read as follows:

Cadáver ya la patria parecía
En cuyos labios cárdenos la muerte
Su sed de sangre férvida calmaba, –
Sobre el que pavorosa se cernía
La noche de la infamia, – y lo envolvía
Nube de inmundas aves que graznaba
Con hórrida y frenética alegría. –
Y el cadáver soberbio se levanta
Y a ciclópeos golpes de su brazo
En tierra el opresor vencido rueda; –

¹ Gray (1962), 6–7.

Y la avarienta muerte
 En vida exuberante se convierte: –
 Claro, espléndido día
 De aquella tenebrosa noche queda:
 Lauros la frente destrozada adornan
 De esta tierra de siervos,
 Y en varones enérgicos se tornan
 Las fatídicas alas de los cuervos:
 A luchar! a luchar! luzca el acero
 E iluminen sus rayos la pelea
 Y a su fulgor el déspota impotente
 Vencido incline la manchada frente!
 De nuestra indignación víctima sea,
 Y quién osó llamarnos siervos suyos
 A los nuestros les sirva de presea! –
 Y cuando el padre Sol sus rayos vibre,
 Surcando el viento en las rizadas olas
 Lleve presto a las playas españolas
 El bravo despertar de Cuba libre! –²

[The homeland now seemed a cadaver on whose purple lips death sated her fervid thirst for blood, over whom the dreadful night of infamy loomed, enveloped in a cloud of filthy birds that cackled with a horrid and frenetic joy. And the magnificent cadaver arises and, with cyclopean blows of her arm, sends the vanquished oppressor rolling over the earth; and avaricious death transforms into exuberant life; bright, splendid day is what remains of that gloomy night. Laurels adorn the shattered brow of this land of serfs, and the fateful wings of the crows turn into vigorous men: To the fray! To the fray! May the blade glisten and its rays illuminate the conflict and the vanquished, impotent despot bow his tarnished brow in its gleam! May he be a victim of our indignation, and may he who dared to call us his serfs serve as a trophy for those on our side! And when Father Sun rattles his rays, with the wind furrowing the cresting waves, bear swiftly to the Spanish shores the brave awakening of free Cuba!]

2 Lns. 66–94. We here preserve Martí's rather idiosyncratic punctuation, including the long dash with which the poem ends. All quotations of Martí's poetry are from Martí (2013). Translations are our own, and are intended as a closely literal guide to the original text.

It is a depiction worthy of Goya's darkest paintings. Amid a generally exultant call to arms, Martí's vision of future triumph is not without elements of the macabre, not without provocative ambiguities. The problematic tensions here cluster around the figure of the gigantic, zombie-like woman who represents Martí's personified *patria*, Cuba. It is an image to which Martí would return throughout his poetic career. The poem elaborates a motif which would also fascinate Anglo-American and European modernists more widely, as part of their broader project of engagement with Classical antiquity.

This essay examines the figure of the colossal woman in Martí's poetry – poetry which ushered in an aesthetic movement in Hispanic American literature known as *modernismo*. Martí's status as instigator of *modernismo* has been a point of some critical contention. Much of the problem is due to imprecise definitions of *modernismo* itself, a term coined by Rubén Darío, Martí's direct successor. Darío himself, the quintessential *modernista*, acknowledged Martí as the founding poet of the aesthetic tendencies that would later coalesce around this designation.³

Martí, as the prototypical *modernista*, offers scope for a prime case study. His engagement with Classical imagery, in particular, initiated a distinctive manner of using materials from the imagined, imaginative past of Mediterranean antiquity. Even Rubén Darío's most well-known symbol, the centaur, has a precedent in Martí's "hipántropo,"⁴ and Martí was equally innovative in his representations of female colossi, which, in his writing, are variously monstrous, martial, maternal, mutilated, masculine, and always multifaceted. With close attention to particular examples of such images in Martí's poetry, this essay analyzes their forms and functions. It follows a roughly chronological treatment, insofar as Martí's poetic works can be dated with any accuracy, in order to chart his sustained elaboration of the gigantic woman at the genesis of *modernismo*. The female colossus is also, ultimately, a crucial site of nexus between the aesthetics of international modernism and Hispanic *modernismo*.

Colossal Precedents

Critics and theorists have been nearly unanimous in insisting on the distinction between modernism and *modernismo*. As Tace Hedrick succinctly cautions, "‘modernismo’ in Latin American Spanish and ‘modernism’ in the

3 Recent critical assessments have pointed with greater confidence to Martí as *modernismo*'s earliest proponent in poetry as well as prose. Morales (1994), 480–95; Jrade (1996), 10.

4 Ln. 14 of "El pecho lleno de lágrimas."

English-language sense are quite different”;⁵ or, in the words of Vera Kutzinski, “*modernismo* does not unproblematically translate as literary modernism, certainly not of the Anglo-American variety. In fact, *modernismo* is in many ways a false cognate.”⁶ Such recurring admonitions, Alejandro Mejías-López notes, roundly serve to “reassure any unsuspecting reader that indeed modernismo is *not* modernism.”⁷ The critical tradition has stressed their differences, rather than their commonalities, with attendant warnings against conceptual conflation. “Despite some parallels, the differences between the two concepts are too many to warrant their critical coalescence.”⁸ It is a crucial cautionary point. Conceptual coalescence or conflation is, of course, unhelpful here; assuming an equation merely on grounds of cognate terms, false cognates or otherwise, would be fallacious, to say the least. Nevertheless, drawing a neat, categorical, terminological division between these movements risks obscuring rich areas of overlap and interplay. In reality, as amorphous movements and aesthetic modes, they share certain concerns and poetics. The motif of the female colossus constitutes one point of intersection between them. On her prodigious, statuesque body, one can read the modernists’ paradoxical obsession with “the reappearance or resuscitation of the past,” their vision of “the primordial past as the source of long-stored energy,” to borrow two apt phrases from Herbert Schneidau’s *Waking Giants: The Presence of the Past in Modernism*, alongside their anxieties about socio-political progress and the modern self.⁹

5 Hedrick (2003), 28.

6 Kutzinski (2012), 92.

7 Mejías-López (2009), 2. Italics in the original.

8 Eysteinnsson (1990), 1.

9 Schneidau (1991), x, 21. Schneidau goes on to detail modernists’ representation of the gargantuan, with reference to writers such as Hardy and Joyce: “Hardy was particularly attracted to giants and their works in the earth, as interpreted by legend: [...] giants are the most compelling form of the belief in the persistence of superhuman energies embodied in the landscape,” while “Joyce encapsulated it all by making the dominant image of his last work the waking corpse of a giant who [...] lies buried in the Dublin landscape.” Schneidau (1991), 38, 21. Elizabeth Prettejohn has documented the modernist fascination with the fragments and apparent contradictions of Classical sculpture, in particular the female figures of the Elgin Marbles and the Venus de Milo. The latter, standing over two meters tall, “was commanding in stature; her proportions were strikingly massive,” and “the Venus helped to initiate a new taste for the fragmentary and time-worn [...] its visual appearance was modern, in one way, as well as ancient in another.” Prettejohn (2012), 82. These figures inspired “a modernist transformation of the classical ideal, in which the traditional connotations of grandeur, heroism and majesty are stripped away to concentrate on the sculptural basics of massiveness, solidity and sheer size.” Prettejohn (2012), 239. Statuesque “classical female figures like those unearthed at Tanagra, Greece, in the 1870s and displayed at the British Museum, [...]”

Of course, representing a nation, region, or city as a giant woman was nothing new. This basic vehicle of personification is at least as old as ancient Mesopotamian traditions that depicted a city-state as a larger-than-life goddess, sometimes as the wife of a deity, sometimes as a more independent maternal figure. The compelling image survived, even in monotheism, in the form of personifications: the City of Zion as a virgin or mother in Hebrew poetry, with Babylon as an archetypal whore.¹⁰ In the wider Near East and Mediterranean, the most well known examples include Athena, the patron warrior goddess of Athens;¹¹ Demeter, who was said to have revealed her gigantic stature to the people of Eleusis and there established a local cult to herself;¹² and Isis, the divine *prima donna* of Egypt and of Alexandria in particular – all three of which, as immanent tutelary deities, attained varying degrees of identification with the very places and peoples they reify.¹³ In the Hispanic context, various public festivities, from the Middle Ages onward, have featured parades of male and female giants, called *gigantes* or *gigantones*. These hollow, anthropoid contrivances of wickerwork, rags, and papier-mâché are carried along and manipulated by a person hidden inside them – a form of goliath puppetry that is perhaps most associated historically with Corpus Christi processions, in which the *gigantes* represent global regions or continents under the dominion of Christendom.¹⁴

Female colossi as localized goddesses, personified city-states, and processional giants all constitute part of a much broader tradition: that of constructing allegorical representations “of ideal states, of Republics and Empires and Victories [...] through the symbolic form of the female figure,” as Marina Warner describes.¹⁵ All great movements in the arts have engaged with the past. The Renaissance, Neoclassicism, modernism – all revisit antiquity and are distinguishable by their distinct ways of reimagining those cultural precedents. The same is true for their distinct engagements with the larger-than-life female form. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, in Martí’s lifetime, a veritable “proliferation of female statuary recalled an era when

fascinated H. D., Isadora Duncan, and other modernists.” Preston (2011), 222. See also Colby (2009), 36–60; and Zox-Weaver (2011), 169–72.

10 Dille (2004), 157–60.

11 Athena deserves special mention as a goddess who was portrayed in colossal statues in the Parthenon and as Athena Promachus, a bronze statue standing over seventy feet high, on the Acropolis. See Smith (1870), s.v. “colossus.” For later traditions in this same vein, see Vermeule (1974) on imperial female personifications.

12 Blundell (1995), 26–9, 40–3.

13 Rowlandson (2003), 49–54.

14 Fisher (2011), 199–200.

15 Warner (1996), xix.

mythic or symbolic figures, carved in stone, inspired worship or allegiance;" as Serafina Bathrick notes, on the eve of modernism in its broadest sense, such "monumental female statues [...] conform[ed] to the tenets of a Greco-Roman revival in the arts."¹⁶ Germania, Italia, La République, Columbia (alias Liberty), Britannia – these female, allegorical icons represented national ideals and the bodies of nations on a heroic scale, a vestige of which survives in today's Miss USA, Miss America, and Miss Universe pageants. In the nineteenth century, "the idea of colossi was in the air, inspired by devotion to the buildings of the ancient world."¹⁷ But Martí, like the *modernistas* in his wake, and like the modernists more broadly, adopts and adapts this allegorical convention in a manner that problematizes the ideal. In contraposition to the unequivocal female figureheads for idealized nations, which "elevat[e] the mythic figure of Woman to a position of centrality and public awe,"¹⁸ Martí creates more ambiguous imagery.

Cuba as a Giant Zombie

Even in his earliest efforts as a young writer, Martí experimented with representations of Cuba as a woman. It was a conventional allegory, to be sure, but a convention that was by no means invariable or exempt from revision.¹⁹ In the first of his writing to be printed, an 1869 political pamphlet called *El diablo cojuelo* [The Crippled Devil], Martí and his coauthor Fermín Valdés Domínguez portray "Señorita Cuba" who, with reference to the fragile, intermittent freedom of the press under the colonial regime, pays a visit to a newspaper editor "to reclaim her voice."²⁰ This is simple, straightforward satire. Martí's later elaborations of this motif are notably more complex.

Turning our attention again to the poem with which we began, Martí's early elaboration of the colossal female figure to represent the awakening of "Cuba libre" does not offer the fully positive image that one might normally expect from a committed, patriotic poet. This depiction of Cuba as a reanimated corpse – with bloodstained lips and wordless violence – would not be out of place among voguish representations of zombies in today's popular media. And like the mantra of today's creative writing instructors, the poem shows the reader that this personification of Cuba is colossal; it does not merely tell the

16 Bathrick (1990), 79, 81.

17 Warner (1996), 8.

18 Bathrick (1990), 90.

19 Warner (1996), 259–60.

20 Martí (1991), 33.

reader so. Subtle elements here show that this revenant is of gigantic dimensions. One might at first imagine the *patria*-as-cadaver to be of normal human proportions, but the image of the cadaver enveloped by a cloud of birds (which line 83 indicates are carrion crows) suggests something larger. That the wings of these birds flocking around the cadaver subsequently turn into men in line 82 hints that the birds themselves are abnormally large. The resurrected cadaver's display of superhuman strength confirms these intimations concerning her colossal nature, as she single-handedly routs the oppressor in lines 74–5.

The colossal figures permit the poet ample liberty for effective scale manipulation, shifting between nebulous crows' wings and vast geographical expanses. Indeed, as quoted above, the last two dozen lines of the poem describe an oneiric transformation, in which the natural order is transcended and transmuted. Martí's image of colossal resurrection entails a chiastic exchange: animating the inanimate while reducing historical persons to inanimate material. The poem personifies the despotic oppressor (the Spanish colonial authorities) as a single enemy combatant in lines 75 and 86–7; the personification gives way to a dehumanizing transition, as the vanquished despot becomes an inanimate "presea" in line 90 (a jewel, a medal awarded to a victor). The personified land, for its part, retains reminders of its inanimate anatomy, such as its earthy forehead in lines 80–1. The terranean, statuesque brow is crowned with a wreath of laurel leaves, the Classical emblem of victory.

This focus on the analogical interplay of inanimate and animate elements, centered on the giant's earthy forehead, grounds a constellation of imagery in the poem. The "tierra" is at once the soil, befitting an image of exhumation and resurrection, and the more abstract concept of homeland – the land as a socio-political idea. The forehead is also the site of the Cyclopes' single eye. "Ciclópeos," the adjective in line 74, constitutes a brief but significant allusion to the Classical tradition. Through this device, Martí succinctly conveys Cuba's geopolitical position as he envisioned it. The Cyclopes of Greco-Roman mythology, the gigantic, chthonic offspring of Gaia (earth) and Ouranos (sky), play a key role in the cosmic war known as the Titanomachy, when the rebel gods of Olympia overthrow the Titans. Due to the Cyclopes' ugliness, their father initially confines them to the depths of Tartarus. In return for their release from the underworld, they forge Zeus' signature weapon, the thunderbolt. With this weapon, Zeus and the Olympian gods defeat the Titanic giants, according to the earliest record of ancient Greek cosmology, Hesiod's *Theogony*.²¹ Later, the Cyclopes serve as blacksmiths in Hephaestus's forge and dwell in volcanoes such as Mount Aetna.

21 Lns. 139–146, 501–6.

One can see how Martí's allusion serves to align the colonial Cuban insurrection with the participants in a successful uprising among the ancient Mediterranean gods. But although the allusion places the Cuban colossus on the side of the victors in the myth, it also depicts her as vulnerable and subject to exploitation. The Cyclopes of Classical mythology are caught between superior forces in a struggle for cosmic sovereignty. In spite of or because of their enormous size and creative skills, no sooner do they attain freedom from captivity in Tartarus than they find themselves in thrall to new masters. Martí likewise perceived Cuba to be caught between her colonial overlords and the mounting pressures of her closest neighbor to the north. Calls for gaining independence from Spain by annexing the island as a territory of the United States were growing louder both inside Cuba and beyond. Martí later wrote a satirical poem concerning precisely this state of affairs. In "Tengo que contarles" [I Have to Tell Them], an aggressive male suitor courts a demure lady before she has formally left her father's house: first the suitor kisses her hand and, in spite of her protests, then kisses her wrist, and ultimately impregnates her in the same visit.²² The moral of this "fabulita" for the "antianexionistas" is clear: any concessions to the United States could cause American encroachments to escalate too far, too quickly, until Cuba merely passes from one imperial power to another. In terms of the vulnerability implied in the allusion to the Cyclopes, Martí was surely aware that the most well known story concerning the Cyclopes is the episode from the ninth book of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus and his men cunningly blind the Cyclops with a stake. This is "la frente destrozada [...] / De esta tierra de siervos," the shattered forehead of this land of serfs.²³ Martí's monstrous *patria*, albeit resurrected, is not only vulnerable but also wounded.

This colossal, cyclopean, zombie-like woman presents one further matter of complexity. By tradition, Cyclopes are indisputably male, for Classical texts do not record the existence of any female Cyclopes. The colossus, in this case, is ambiguously gendered – a degree of ambiguity that is fitting for a personification of the *patria* (homeland, motherland, fatherland). The Spanish word itself embodies and reiterates a certain ambivalence between genders. Although *la patria* is a grammatically feminine noun, the Spanish term derives from the Latin (via Greek) *pater* (father), and, as Doris Sommer points out, "the feminine *patria* literally means belonging to the father."²⁴ Nevertheless, as Sommer further argues, the implied, "imagined patriarchal figure" of the *patria* is

22 Martí (2013), 403–4.

23 Lns. 80–1.

24 Sommer (1993), 258.

etymologically and figuratively dependent within this metaphorical schema: he “needs the female land to bear his name, to give him national dimensions and the status of father.”²⁵ The outworking of these ambiguities in Martí’s poem remains a point of tension in its imaginative expression. Are readers to imagine this colossal monstrosity as female, male, or something in between? In most of the poem, the *patria* is unmistakably “ella” (line 77); she is a “*patria oprimida*,” “*nuestra patria sierva*” groaning in bondage (lines 22 and 52), but the waking cadaver of the closing stanza eschews clear gender markers. Even “*libre*” (free), the adjective applied to Cuba in the poem’s closing line – the first instance in which the text explicitly names Cuba – is a Spanish adjective that remains invariable regardless of the gender of the noun it modifies.

The image with which Martí’s “*Venid! Venid; – mi sangre bullidora*” culminates, then, invites the reader to imagine a revived Cuba as a potentially androgynous colossus who obliterates her despotic oppressors with cyclopean force. As we have seen, it is not an altogether positive, straightforward characterization of the *patria*: this portrayal of patriotic resurrection and insurrection also exhibits an awareness of vulnerability and monstrous, physical trauma. Yet neither is the monstrosity lacking in positive implications. This is no static icon in the Dea Roma tradition. Here is dynamic, political, and poetic potential writ large – potentialities that Martí would continue to explore in his subsequent iterations of the motif.

Martí’s Homagno and Lady Liberty

In his *Versos libres*, a collection of poems written around 1882 but only published posthumously, Martí develops a character he names “Homagno,” a neologism for a Herculean *homo magnus* persona. Homagno himself is a colossus that comprises human and inanimate elements, such as his hair and hands made of stone; he is a hybrid akin to the legendary Gilgamesh, partially human with divine or superhuman qualities, and Martí devotes three poems to the persona. The first is an introduction to this problematic, humongous hero. The eponymous Homagno recognizes himself to be almost entirely artificial: “*Máscara soy, mentira soy, [...] Mis ojos sólo, [...] que me revelan mi disfraz, son míos! [...] Talló el Creador mis colosales hombros [...] Muerdo, atormento, beso las callosas manos de piedra que golpeo*” [I am a mask, I am a lie. Only my eyes, which reveal to me my disguise, are mine! The Creator carved

25 Sommer (1993), 258.

my colossal shoulders. I gnaw at, torture, kiss the calloused hands of stone that I am flailing].²⁶

Naturally, a statuesque *homo magnus* needs a larger-than-life mother. In the second of the Homagno poems, “Yugo y estrella” [Yoke and Star], his mother offers him a choice between these two titular symbols: he can labor comfortably as a conformist, or he can carry the star, to lead and illuminate men, though the same star will ultimately bring about his isolation and death. “De [su madre] y de la Creación suma y reflejo” [Compendium and reflection of his mother and of Creation], Homagno chooses to take on both the yoke and the star simultaneously: standing tall, he will shoulder the yoke and wear the star on his forehead.²⁷

The third in this trio of poems, “Homagno audaz” [Bold Homagno], depicts a dying Homagno as he offers advice to a protégé called Jóveno, the personification of youth and youthfulness. Jóveno asks him for the key that “abre las puertas del placer profundo” (line 29) [opens the doors of profound pleasure], and Homagno consents to reveal “La llave de la fuerza, la del goce / Sereno y penetrante, la del hondo / Valor que a mundos y a villas, / Cual gigante amazona desafía” (lines 35–8) [the key to strength, to serene and penetrating joy, to deep valor that defies worlds and boroughs like a giant Amazon]. Reminiscent of the wounded Cyclops, this ideal key is akin to the self-mutilating Amazons, who, according to mythology, cut off their right breasts so as to improve their archery. Homagno then conjures up a series of women in the form of enormous, and strikingly phallic, statuesque keys: “Aquí están, a tus ojos, en hilera, / Frías y dormidas como estatuas, todas” (lines 67–8) [Here they are, lined up before your eyes, all of them cold and dormant like statues]; but these women-keys prove to be “llaves falsas / Con que en vano echa el hombre a abrir el cielo” (lines 91–2) [false keys by which man tries in vain to open heaven]. Homagno discerns their true nature:

Las miro como son: cáscaras todas,
 Ésta de nácar, cual la Aurora brinda,
 Humo como la Aurora; ésta de bronce;
 marfil ésta; ésa ébano; y aquella
 De esos diestros barrillos italianos
 [.]
 ;Se hacen muy fácilmente, y duran poco,
 Las estatuas de cieno!

26 Lns. 4, 11–2, 18, 23–4.

27 Ln. 3.

[I see them as they are, all hollow shells: this one of mother-of-pearl like the Dawn gives forth, vapor like the Dawn; this one of bronze, this one ivory, this one ebony, and that one of finely wrought Italian earthenware. Mud statues are very easy to make and last only briefly!]²⁸

Finally, out of a hundred women-keys, Jóveno finds one whose interior is genuinely flesh and blood, and “la rehac[e] / De prisa con [s]us manos” [he quickly remakes her with his hands].²⁹

This allegorical triptych features elements that are essential to Martí’s recurring variations on the motif of the female colossus: a medley of animate and inanimate, and virile and feminine properties; a sense of hollow artifice and vulnerability; allusions to a monstrous or mutilated figure of Classical mythology; and a personification that is subject to male construction and male intervention. Reading these poems alongside Martí’s essay on the Statue of Liberty – which constitutes, in essence, Martí’s interpretative reflections on the most renowned female colossus of the nineteenth century – helps to illuminate the significance of these elements in his imagery.

The Statue of Liberty, or, to use its proper title, *La Liberté éclairant le monde* (Liberty Enlightening the World), was unveiled and inaugurated on October 28, 1886. Martí was living in New York City at the time and composed an account of the event for *La Nación* newspaper of Buenos Aires. This piece of journalism, titled “Fiestas de la Estatua de la Libertad” [Celebrations for the Statue of Liberty], presents a blow-by-blow chronicle of the inaugural activities, interspersed with Martí’s fanciful meditations on the statue. In the Cuban poet’s vision, this colossus is an heir to Classical iconography (the triumphal, processional cart, the Cyclops, the colossi of Rhodes and Thebes, the Dea Roma), but it surpasses them all.³⁰ This “madre inmensa” [immense mother] mirrors and sublimates contemporary concerns: the crowds “celebran el monumento de la libertad porque en él les parece que se levantan y recobran a sí propios” [celebrate the monument to liberty because in it, as it seems to them, they elevate and win back their very selves]; she is an “imagen en que cada hombre se ve como redimido y encumbrado” [image in which each man sees himself as redeemed and exalted].³¹

28 Lns. 94–103.

29 Lns. 132–3.

30 Martí (1995), 177, 188–9.

31 Martí (1995), 183, 190–3.

Herein one can perceive Martí again working through his complex, sometimes conflicted, ideas concerning the female colossus, albeit more explicitly in prose. Once more he indulges the urge to animate the statuesque icon. “Parecía viva,” Martí observes [She seemed alive].³² He imagines the statue, whose hollow interior would welcome countless visitors, now drawing swarms of souls towards herself: “Parecía que las almas se abrían, y volaban a cobijarse en los pliegues de su túnica, a murmurar en sus oídos, a posarse en sus hombros, a morir como las mariposas en su luz” [Souls seemed to unfurl and fly to shelter in the folds of her robe, to whisper in her ears, to perch on her shoulders, to die like moths in her light].³³ The colossus, and the liberty she represents, are uplifting as well as fatal. Mounted on “su pedestal ciclópeo” [her cyclopean pedestal], Liberty, like the colossal zombie and hollow women-keys, is enormous as well as vulnerable, imposing as well as fragile.³⁴

And this colossal female is ultimately sculpted by the male artist. She is man’s construction: “¡oh diosa hija del hombre! [...] creces al mismo tiempo que el hombre” [Oh goddess-daughter of man! You grow at the same time as man grows], Martí exclaims.³⁵ The Statue of Liberty is a canvas for male self-projections, and not only for general aspirations toward liberty and social redemption, as previously cited. Instead, Martí’s essay envisions the statue as a specular spectacle, an embodiment of personal, autobiographical struggle – a self-portrait of its maker and of the *patria* simultaneously. That is to say, Martí identifies with the sculptor, Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, on the one hand, and, conversely, he imagines the statue’s creator as a poet, a bard for the people and *patria* as a whole. In an apostrophe to the statue, Martí declares, “Aquí estás como el sueño del poeta, grande como el espacio de la tierra al cielo” [Here you stand, like the poet’s dream, as large as the span between earth and heaven].³⁶ Bartholdi, as poet-sculptor, has drawn upon his first-hand familiarity with ancient Mediterranean statuary to give shape and expression to a more universal sentiment: “la hermosura y grandeza de la libertad tomaron a sus ojos, hechos a contemplar los colosos de Egipto, esas gigantes proporciones y majestad eminente a que la patria sube en el espíritu de los que viven sin ella: de la esperanza de la patria entera hizo Bartholdi su estatua soberana” [in his eyes, eyes made for contemplating the colossi of Egypt, the beauty and grandeur of liberty took on those gigantic proportions and that lofty majesty to which the

32 Martí (1995), 188.

33 Martí (1995), 188.

34 Martí (1995), 181.

35 Martí (1995), 178.

36 Martí (1995), 178.

patria ascends within the spirit of those who live without her: from the hope of the whole *patria* Bartholdi fashioned his magnificent statue].³⁷

Martí identifies with Bartholdi in part because of parallels he perceives in the sculptor's life experience and his own. Both men lived in exile from their homelands – Bartholdi in self-imposed exile from his native Alsace after it was annexed to the Kaiser's new German Empire in 1871. For this reason, Martí claims that the Statue of Liberty reflects its maker's patriotic heartache: "Jamás sin dolor profundo produjo el hombre obras verdaderamente bellas. Por eso [...] la estatua [...] tiene inclinada la cabeza, y un tinte de viudez en el semblante" [Man never produced truly beautiful works without profound sorrow. This is why the statue's head bows slightly downward, a tinge of widowhood in her countenance].³⁸ The interrelationship that Martí envisions between sculptor and sculpture underlies his degrees of self-identification with the colossal personification in his poetry.

The *Patria* as a Widowed Giantess

In *Flores del destierro*, a posthumous anthology that Martí had left partially prepared for publication at the time of his death, the poet returns to the motif of the personified *patria*.³⁹ Cuba looms large in "Dos patrias" [Two Homelands]. The full poem in *Flores del destierro* reads as follows:

Dos patrias tengo yo: Cuba y la noche.
 ¿O son una las dos? No bien retira
 Su majestad el sol, con largos velos
 Y un clavel en la mano, silenciosa
 Cuba cual viuda triste me aparece.
 ¡Yo sé cuál es ese clavel sangriento
 Que en la mano le tiembla! Está vacío
 Mi pecho, destrozado está y vacío
 En donde estaba el corazón. Ya es hora
 De empezar a morir. La luz estorba
 Y la palabra humana. El universo
 Habla mejor que el hombre.

37 Martí (1995), 185.

38 Martí (1995), 185.

39 Armas (1978), 65–66.

Cual bandera

Que invita a batallar, la llama roja
 De la vela flamea. Las ventanas
 Abro, ya estrecho en mí. Muda, rompiendo
 Las hojas del clavel, como una nube
 Que unturbia el cielo, Cuba, viuda, pasa . . .

[I have two homelands: Cuba and the night. Or are they one? No sooner does the sun withdraw its majesty, when, draped in veils and silent, a carnation in her hand, a somber Cuba appears to me like a widow. Blood-red flower trembling in her hand – I know it well. My chest is empty now; my chest is wrecked and empty where my heart once was. Now comes the hour to begin to die. The light inhibits and the word makes human. The universe speaks better than mankind. Just like a flag that summons one to battle, so the red flame of my candle billows. Stifled in myself, I raise the windows. Voiceless, tearing the carnation's petals, like a cloud which blears the sky, thus Cuba, widowed, passes by . . .]⁴⁰

Martí's prologue to *Flores del destierro*, as part of a traditional strategy of *captatio benevolentiae*, downplays the sustained effort that went into the composition of these poems: "Estas [...] no son composiciones acabadas: son [...] notas de imágenes tomadas al vuelo, y como para que no se escapasen, entre la muchedumbre antiática de las calles, entre el rodar estruendoso y arrebatado de los ferrocarriles, o en los quehaceres apremiantes e inflexibles" [These are not finished compositions; they are notes on images jotted down on the fly, as if to prevent them from slipping away among the anti-Athenian throng of the street, among the hurried, thunderous circulation of the railways, or among oppressive, relentless tasks].⁴¹ But as we have seen, the image of the personified homeland in "Dos patrias" is no mere passing whim dashed off in the midst of modern pressures and personal distractions. It is, rather, an image to which Martí returned repeatedly throughout his oeuvre, an image on which he meditated, reimagining and revising the colossal female for varied poetic purposes. Nevertheless, the notional quality of being unfinished is key to his imagery in "Dos patrias."

Here, scarcely more than a hint indicates that this bleak *patria-viuda* is a larger-than-life woman. Akin to the cloud of crows in "Venid! Venid; – mi sangre bullidora," this nebulous figure obscures the sky – the sole indication that

⁴⁰ Ellipsis as in original.

⁴¹ Martí (2013), 201.

she is of astronomical proportions. The violence she commits also appears reduced in scale. Instead of routing enemy forces with a cyclopean arm, she is tearing apart a bloodstained carnation. The nocturnal speaker leaves much of the poem's figurative language enigmatic, without defining the terms of the metaphor. Is the bloodstained carnation his now missing heart? The parallel construction suggests as much. One enigma, at least, is defined: the simile expressed in line 5 becomes a metaphor by the final line, thereby articulating a closer equation between the *patria* Cuba and the personification. Cuba is the spectral widow. As in "Venid! Venid," the poem culminates with this climactic image.

But why a "widow"? Once more we encounter a representation of the female colossus that is interdependent in its relation to the male. Widow, as a term, denotes a status which is, by definition, contingent on the male; it is defined only with reference to a woman's relationship to a man and the status of that man's life. Cuba's widowhood in "Dos patrias" recalls the well known medieval Spanish ballad "Abenámbar," which personifies the city and kingdom of Granada as a woman. Granada, in the ballad, declines the Castilian king's marriage proposal by answering the would-be conqueror, "casada soy que no viuda" [I am married, not a widow]. In the light of this precedent, the reiterated representation of widowed Cuba is another expression of her ambivalent geopolitical situation, vacillating between genuine liberty and fragile instability.⁴² Her colonial overlords are moribund. The question in Martí's vision, as it was in "Venid! Venid," is whether she will attain lasting independence or succumb to the control of new powers, wed to North American influence. The question, in Martí's lifetime and in his allegory, remained unanswered. The poem, in this sense, is unfinished, as Martí's prologue would have the reader imagine; the ellipsis at the poem's inconclusive conclusion is significant in this regard. Indeed, the characterization of the female colossus in "Dos patrias" underscores this sense of Cuba as an ongoing, problematic object of unresolved consideration. At the risk of unduly mixing metaphors, one might view her as a blank slate, veiled and silent. Faceless, she is adaptable for whatever image the poetic persona or reader might project upon her. Wordless, like the gigantic zombie, like the women-keys of "Homagno audaz" who never speak though they are spoken about, or like Señorita Cuba who must reclaim her voice, this personified *patria* is scripted by the poet or visionary; her ambiguous features are ready for (re)writing.

42 Ln. 30.

Conclusion: Sizing Up the Giants

What, then, is the poetic utility or potential that Martí found in the image of the female colossus? What does this figure achieve in Martí's handling of it? Concerning the primitivist and archaic turn in modernism, Terry Eagleton has observed that "Recycling mythology is one way in which modernism finds itself excavating the very old just at the point where it thought it was discovering the very new."⁴³ Martí and his immediate successors in Hispanic *modernismo* were not, of course, laboring under the delusion that they were discovering utterly new material. They were engaged in making it new, as Pound's later dictum would exhort. At the dawn of *modernismo*, Rubén Darío wrote in 1909, "tendí hacia el pasado, a las antiguas mitologías y a las espléndidas historias" [I stretched towards the past, towards ancient mythologies and splendid histories].⁴⁴ Among the ancient material that the New World inherited from Classical antiquity, Martí resurrected and revised the female colossus as a fruitful and supple symbol, onto which the poet can project and negotiate questions of nationhood and selfhood.

The colossal woman proves to be eminently adaptable. She can embody liberty, fragile or otherwise, and also grants the poet enormous, imaginative liberty. By animating the colossus, by giving the monstrous cadaver life, he renders her a dynamic, speculative, oneiric image that can signify by its characterization and its actions; its size and silence give the poet ample scope. Moreover, the lively sculpture fits Martí's metapoetic vision of poetry itself. He imagines ideal poetry as being "frase unida / A frase colosal" [phrase joined to colossal phrase].⁴⁵ In his prologue to the same collection in which the "Homagno" poems appear, Martí writes, "Amo [...] el verso escultórico, vibrante como la porcelana" [I love sculptural verse, quivering like porcelain].⁴⁶ For the sculptor-poet, Martí declares in his essay on the Statue of Liberty, this is the efficacy and purpose of the colossal form: "No se vive sin sacar luz en familiaridad con lo enorme. [...] Engrandece la simple capacidad de admirar lo grande, cuanto más el moldearlo, el acariciarlo, el ponerlo alas, el sacar del espíritu en idea lo que a brazos, a miradas profundas, a golpes de cariño ha de ir encorvando y encendiendo el marmol y el bronce" [One does not really live unless illumined

43 Eagleton (2000), 41.

44 Quoted in d'Ors (2005), 290. Darío himself would elaborate the image of the Classical colossus in his "Salutación del optimista" around 1905. Darío (1949), 100–2. We are grateful to Stephen Hart for bringing this text to our attention.

45 Martí (2013), 93.

46 Martí (2013), 89.

through familiarity with the Enormous. The simple capacity to admire what is great in size and grandeur serves to enlarge and ennoble, and even more so the capacity to mold it, caress it, give it wings, draw forth from the spirit in ideal form that which, under one's arms, under one's penetrating gaze and loving blows, shall go about bending and inflaming the marble and bronze].⁴⁷ The image of the female colossus is as much about poetry as it is about the *patria*.

As Aníbal González argues, "the *modernistas* returned, with an intention that was critical as well as creative, to prior stages of literary history [such as] Classical antiquity."⁴⁸ The statement is equally true for the modernists of subsequent generations internationally. The key nexus among *modernistas* and international modernists on this point is the way in which they actualized elements of antiquity in a manner which quarried those elements' inherent tensions: dislocated and fragmentary endurance, fragility in enormity, precarious longevity, in line with the modernists' broader project of questioning the assumed certainties of the past. Martí's critical, creative eye found rich potential in the female colossus for problematizing the complexities of emerging, postcolonial nationhood and the conflicted self. Martí's innovations on the Classical colossus, although they may incorporate some idealized elements, as in his essay on the Statue of Liberty, ultimately offer a notable departure from any sanitized, straightforward icon in the Dea Roma tradition, for instance. Martí's selection of monsters is careful and deliberate: they are vulnerable (Cyclopes), mutilated (Amazons), androgynous, wounded, macabre, or hollow vessels. Problematic, too, is the colossal woman's subordination or dependence on the male; in spite of her superhuman qualities, she is written, sculpted, or repaired by men, and dependent on them for her form and voice.

These complexities, however, are not necessarily indicative of a misogynistic vision. Rather, they constitute the outworking of Martí's personal conflict of choice between "Patria y mujer," between nation and woman, as he puts it in an early poem of the same name.⁴⁹ His sustained development of the *patria*-as-colossus motif permits an imaginative synthesis of the two, rather like Homagno's integrative choice of yoke and star, without denying flaws or dangers inherent in that synthesis. Just as Bartholdi's Lady Liberty, in Martí's vision, could reflect the widow-like grief of the sculptor's exile, so too the colossus of Martí's poetry holds up a refracting mirror to the poet's anxieties. As we have seen, the allegory warns against independent Cuba's becoming a colossal

47 Martí (1995), 184–5.

48 González (2007), 133.

49 Martí (2013), 368–71. For a discussion of Martí's representation of the choice between romantic and patriotic devotion, see Teja (1990), 157–62.

puppet passed between external forces. It offers a cautionary reminder of the precarious geopolitical situation, a vision of how very fragile political, personal, and even poetic freedoms can be. All the while, it still points a patriotic finger towards a powerful superwoman, who is powerfully persuasive precisely because of her surprising vulnerabilities and fruitful ambiguities.

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Educating the “Perfect Imagist”: Greek Literature and Classical Scholarship in the Poetry of H. D.

Bryan Brinkman and Bartholomew Brinkman

In the March, 1913 issue of the fledgling modern little magazine, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Ezra Pound – modernist poet and all around literary instigator – presented the guiding principles of the first major literary movement in Anglo-American modernism in his landmark essay, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste.”¹ As Pound explains, rather than simply being a static visualization, “an ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”² Like the single frame on the film strip, the image captures a dynamic moment of thought and emotion through concrete presentation. To best highlight the image, Pound urges writers to use “no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something. . . . the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol. Go in fear of abstractions.”³

Even in its freeze-frame depiction, Imagism foregrounds elements of speed and newness in ways that are akin to other historical avant-garde artistic movements, such as futurism, and speaks to the spirit of an age dominated by increasingly faster modes of transportation and communication, as well as myriad new media forms. Writers and artists of the time often saw themselves making a clean break with previous generations as they advanced the perpetually new, the perpetually *modern*. Such opposition can be seen in Pound’s call to shun superfluous words and adjectives – a rejoinder to what was often seen as the flowery, overwrought language of the Victorians and a legacy of the long Romantic tradition (some of which Pound had himself practiced early in his career in his Browning-esque dramatic monologues).

At the same time, however, there was an embracing of the distant past, encapsulated in part through an assumption of new visual elements of the archaic. As Kenneth Haynes suggests, “the archaic *kouros* was to the first half of the twentieth century what the Laocoön group was to the Renaissance and

1 Pound (1913).

2 Ibid., 200.

3 Ibid., 201.

Baroque or the Elgin marbles to the Romantic period."⁴ The *kouros*, a particular statue type, was distinct from the more fluid and idealized sculpture of Classical and Hellenistic art, and has come to represent the aesthetic of a particular historical moment in ancient Greece. Visual art, such as Picasso's incorporation of Cycladic imagery, appropriated new avenues of the classical tradition through a broadening notion of Hellenic culture. New ideas of the classical past, and the emergence of a novel visual language attached to that past, prompted distinct modernist engagement from artists in the early 20th century. Imagism itself can be understood as a particular strain of what Vassiliki Kolocotroni has argued for as a general "Modern Hellenism," defined by the impetus toward the staging of romanticized still lifes of the Classical past.⁵

This is one of the central ironies of modernism and the historical avant-garde: a Janus-faced gazing into the ancient past and an unflinching turn to the future, both strategies, it would seem (at least in part) attempt to avert attention from recent history and a present dominated by a devastating world war. This marriage of the old and the new is hardly more evident than in the Imagist movement, and especially in the Imagism of H. D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), one of the most important and influential poets of the twentieth century, celebrated for her formalist experimentation, her challenging of sexual taboos, and her foregrounding of poetry as process.⁶ H. D.'s role in the avant-garde Imagist movement – deeply informed by classical works and scholarship centered on Sappho and the Alexandrian/Hellenistic tradition that laid the foundation for her later work – makes her a central figure for exploring the ways in which the reception of the classical tradition breathed new life into Anglo-American modernism and beyond.

H. D., *Imagiste*

H. D. first made a name for herself as the quintessential Imagist poet. Indeed, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis has argued, "given that the creation of H. D. and the creation of imagism mythically occurred at the very same moment, she was

4 Haynes (2007), 101.

5 Kolocotroni (2012).

6 As Adelaide Morris has argued in *How to Live/What to Do: H. D.'s Cultural Poetics*, H. D. has been an important influence on subsequent modern and postmodern poetry, not only in its subject matter, but in the way that it foregrounds poetry as a process of thinking through language.

not just a poet among other poets, she was poet and perfect exemplar.”⁷ As the story goes, after reading her terse early verses in London, Pound (to whom she had briefly been engaged) immediately exclaimed her *Imagiste*, coining a term for the new movement. Acting as a kind of talent scout and foreign correspondent, Pound then helped to get three poems – “Hermes of the Ways,” “Priapus,” and “Epigram” – published in the January 1913 issue of *Poetry* (two months before “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” would appear), signing her name as “H. D., ‘Imagiste.’”⁸ The poems would appear under the heading “VERSES, TRANSLATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS FROM ‘THE ANTHOLOGY,’” referred to as the *Des Imagistes* anthology, edited by Pound, that would be published the following year. In addition to including five poems by H. D., it featured work by Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, Skipwith Cannell, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, and Pound himself. This anthology would soon be followed by *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), which included poems by Aldington, John Gould Fletcher, Flint, D. H. Lawrence, and Lowell, as well as seven more poems by H. D. As one of the few poets included in both anthologies (along with Aldington and Lowell, the latter extending the movement into what Pound would later deride as “Amygism”), H. D. would become a sustaining voice in the growing chorus.

Imagism is not inherently tied to the classical tradition and, indeed, some of its best known examples, such as Pound’s own “In a Station of the Metro,” would hardly seem to be concerned with classical subject matter. But H. D. and her classical concerns would in many ways dominate and help to shade notions of Imagism as a whole, as is evident in the multiple classical references that Pound makes in his “A Few Don’ts” essay. He suggests, for example, that the budding poet “consider the discrepancies between the actual writing of the Greek poets and dramatists, and the theories of the Graeco-Roman grammarians, concocted to explain their metres.”⁹ Moreover, Sappho (a key influence on H. D., as will soon be seen) tops the list of poets one should turn to for inspiration: “If you want the gist of the matter go to Sappho, Catullus, Villon. . . .”¹⁰

H. D.’s classical Imagism is showcased in her first poetry collection, *Sea Garden*, which included poems first published in *Poetry* and in the Imagist anthologies. As Eileen Gregory has argued, *Sea Garden* should be read as a coherent textual whole, illuminating the mysteries of what she terms the “salt

7 DuPlessis (1986), 8.

8 H. D. (1913).

9 Pound (1913), 201.

10 Ibid., 205.

experience" that is suggested by the "sea" in the book's title, and which underscores the bitterness and pain – but also the resulting wisdom – of experience.¹¹ While Gregory makes a persuasive case for the volume as a coherent text, and for such a salt experience as an important guiding trope, it should be noted that the word "salt" itself appears relatively infrequently in the volume – six times as a standalone word and once as a compound word "salt-crusted."¹² This term helps to form a small cluster of closely-associated words in the volume: "fresh," "stay" "inland" and "painted." The most frequent words (after common words, such as articles, have been removed), showing up at least 10 times in the volume, however, are "wind" (22), "cut/cuts" (20), "leaf" (19), "sea" (18), "flower(s)" (17), "white" (17), "sand" (16), "rocks" (15), "beauty" (14), "violet(s)" (14), "great" (14), "grass" (13), "break(s)" (12), "life" (12), "light" (12), "bring" (10), and "sweet" (10).

This list of words suggests many of the "Do's and Don'ts" of Imagism. Shunning abstractions, H. D. uses concrete nouns that are themselves the adequate symbols for what they represent as they index the natural world and suggest a classical pastoral tradition and perhaps the tropes of a modern environmentalism as well.¹³ Given the volume's title, it is hardly surprising that there is a list of nouns that suggests the seashore ("sea," "sand," "rocks") and a list that suggests the garden ("leaf," "flower," "violet"). It is perhaps more surprising, though, that the verb "wind" is used twenty-two times (not including the compound words "sea-wind," "wind-blast," and "wind-tortured," each used once). The wind is dynamic in these Imagistic texts and is generally invoked as a violent, destructive force. Such violence is echoed in the verbs "cut/cuts" and "break/breaks" (along with two instances each of "breakers" and "wave-break"). Even the noun "violet" (and one time each: "river-violets," "stream-violets," "wood-violets," "sea-violet," "hyacinth-violet" and the possessive "violets") suggests both "violence" and "to violate." The dominance of such violent verbs underscores the fact that these Imagist poems are not simply presenting static scenes, but ones pregnant with powerful and destructive force.

11 Gregory (1986), 538.

12 Word counts were determined through a textual analysis of *Sea Garden*, using Voyant Tools, available at <http://voyant-tools.org/>. The text was taken from the transcribed electronic version of the text, available at Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28665/28665-h/28665-h.htm>), accessed June 15, 2014. It has been edited to remove irrelevant paratextual features and metadata. A list of stop-words was used to remove the most common words and words directly related to the publication apparatus (e.g. "page").

13 Harriet Tarlo argues for such a possibility in "An Insurmountable Chasm?: Re-Visiting, Re-Imagining and Re-Writing Classical Pastoral through the Modernist Poetry of H. D." (2012).

Evincing a stripping of what the Imagists might consider “superfluous” words (which also suggest to some degree a florid Victorian style), the list does not contain adverbs. It also contains relatively few adjectives, and the ones it does contain, such as “great” and “sweet,” are generally used to evoke the senses (e.g. of scale or smell). There are a few abstract nouns in the list, such as “beauty” and “life,” but these are employed self-consciously and self-critically, rather than as unreflecting clichés. For example, most of the instances of “beauty” occur in two poems, “Sheltered Garden” and “Cities,” both of which suggest cultivated, unnatural spaces. In “Cities,” beauty is what has been lost in the building up of civilization; in “Sheltered Garden,” H. D. writes: “For this beauty / beauty without strength, / chokes out life” (40–2), so that beauty is placed in direct opposition to natural strength.

A close consideration of such words suggests not only the particular images being presented in these poems, but also reveals the degree to which there is a relatively restricted vocabulary that is recycled throughout the volume so that words and phrases accrue symbolic weight within individual poems and over the course of the volume. There is a sparseness to such composition that is indebted to the classical tradition and the ways in which H. D. found her way into that tradition through lifelong study and imaginative acts of translation.

H. D., Classicist

Although she would be steeped in classical subjects throughout her life, H. D. was not an academic classicist. She learned Latin formally in high school and at Bryn Mawr College (where she would meet another soon-to-be prominent modern poet, Marianne Moore, before leaving without a degree). She would tackle Greek independently and by her late twenties was mastering some of the more difficult Greek works. As DuPlessis notes, there is an important connection between textuality and sexuality in this context, where “to enter the classics is to confront the issue of cultural authority, for knowledge of Greek and Latin, formerly barred to women and certain males, was the sigil of humanist hegemony.”¹⁴ To evaluate H. D.’s classical training, then, is not only to ask what time and resources were at her disposal for acquiring a particular brand of cultural capital (they were indeed ample), but also to evaluate the degree to which women were given access to such pursuits. Still, H. D. did have

14 DuPlessis (1986), 17.

a solid sense of both primary and secondary classical sources and her command of the languages was on par with that of many other modern poets.¹⁵

Beyond the specific question of gender, it is necessary to place H. D.'s interests in the classical tradition within a larger cultural and scholarly context in order to fully understand the extent to which classical reception impacted an emerging modernism. As Thomas Burnett Swann argued in his early study, *The Classical World of H. D.*, "throughout her work, H. D. has described the classical world with a detailed accuracy made possible by the high level of nineteenth- and twentieth-century classical scholarship" and much of her access to the classical tradition was mediated through nineteenth-century American, British, and French authors.¹⁶ Similarly, as Lars-Håkan Svensson has pointed out, this mediation can be extended to modernism more generally, where "modernists' perceptions of their classical models are influenced not only by the meanings ascribed to the poets by classical philologists but by the translations, imitations, and assessments found in the works of previous writers. It is, in other words, such constructions which are mediated (or modified or rejected) by the modernist imitators and translators."¹⁷

Beyond such mediation, H. D. had direct contact with archaeologists, visiting Apollo's temple at Delphi as well as Luxor in Egypt. The latter site, which had been undergoing excavation since 1885, displays resonances of both the methods and themes of H. D.'s Hellenism. The archaeologically reconstructed Luxor, described in the author's novel *Palimpsest*, was like a backdrop for "staged animation." The reconstructive tendencies in early 20th century archaeology mirrored the task of the poet-translator – new methods of visualizing ancient fragments gave rise to novel ways of interpreting and arranging those fragments for a modern viewer. Luxor – and the material remains of that history unearthed in the 19th century – saw the influence of Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. In this way, Luxor was a material analogue to H. D.'s Alexandrianism discussed below.

H. D.'s classical education began at the start of what Theodor Mommsen anticipated as the 'century of papyrology.'¹⁸ Not only were new texts made available through papyrology, but the trend toward translation of papyrological

15 As Eileen Gregory notes, "certainly by professional classicists' standards, or by the standards of British public school education at the turn of the century, H. D.'s knowledge of classical languages was not profound – nor, indeed, was that of Pound or Aldington." (1997), 54.

16 Swann (1962), 7.

17 Svensson (2003), 113.

18 Turner (1980), 23.

texts made these texts more accessible.¹⁹ H. D. had in her library, marked with her owl bookplate, the two volumes of the Loeb edition of *Select Papyri*. Papyri texts, most important for H. D. in that they were ‘Greco-Egyptian’ and provided new work of Sappho (see below), also challenged nineteenth-century ideas of translation. The lacunose nature of most papyrological texts, and the lack of uniformity in grammar and orthography, did not allow for the “rhetorical, full-blown translations” common in Romantic texts of classical literature.²⁰ These translations approached – though through pragmatic concerns rather than aesthetic choice – Imagistic concision.

Similarly, the availability of new texts, as compiled in the *Greek Anthology*, informed the Imagist project in general. Indeed, for H. D. it was perhaps the epigrammatist Meleager – whose *Garland* formed the foundation for the *Anthology* – that had the greatest impact on the poet.²¹ What Pound and H. D. found in these poems was a modern “straight talk” that would become a core principle of Imagism. Specifically, it was Mackail’s text of *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (1918), a copy of which was held in the library of H. D.’s friend and partner Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman) with H. D.’s rose bookplate, that had the greatest impact. Gideon Nisbet has gone so far as to suggest that Mackail’s edition was perhaps “the key text” of the Imagist movement.²² What was so influential in the edition was not only the epigrammatic texts, but their presentation as well: “The rhetoric of [Mackail’s] introduction . . . packaged the *Anthology* as the unmediated transcription (‘straight talk’) of humble and healthy Greek life.”²³

One can locate this same influence in H. D.’s translations. Not only did the poet’s earliest translations (1913) come from the *Greek Anthology*, but most of her translations were, in a sense, anthological. That is to say, with the exception of Euripides’ *Ion* (1937), H. D. translated only the Choruses from the Euripidean corpus (*Iphigenia at Aulis*, 1916; *Hippolytus*, 1919), preferring one-off acts of translation rather than the kind of extensive translation projects that some other modern poets would engage in. Nevertheless, translation was central to her work. Not only was the act of translating texts from Greek an essential part of her poetic project, but the notion of “translation/the translator” was a means

19 This trend toward translation was influenced most strongly by the editorial decisions of Grenfell and Hunt in the Oxyrhynchus volumes; see Keenan (2009), 62.

20 Swann (1962), 8.

21 Gregory (1997), 50–2.

22 Nisbet (2013), 285.

23 Quoted in Nisbet (2013), 285.

through which H. D. fashioned her place within modernism, particularly with regards to her sexual identity. As Steven Yao suggests, "translation" also played a role in H. D.'s "growth as a writer when she came in her fiction to review and narrate the history of her own poetic evolution."²⁴ That is, H. D. translated her own identity into literary characters and "thereby created her own 'legend.'"²⁵ One finds in the characters of Hipparchia (*Palimpsest*) and Julia (*Bid Me to Love*), a translated version of the poet herself.

Indeed, in her acts of translation, H. D. discovered within the inherent ambiguity between a source text, and its new life in English, the opportunity for generating novel aesthetic expression. Betty Vanderwielen points to the way in which Greek literature offers liminal or threshold spaces, and quotes H. D.'s *Ion*, where one is encouraged to "see *through* the words; the word being but the outline, the architectural structure of that door or window, through which we are all free . . . to pass."²⁶ H. D.'s concern with the act of translation, particularly of classical texts, can be seen as part of a larger movement within modernist poetry. As Daniel Hooley has suggested, the increasing unfamiliarity with classical languages prompted modernists to view classical texts as, "less a burden and curse than a *terra incognita*."²⁷ For certain modernist writers, translation was not a staged literary museum, but an act of cultural renewal providing a distinct "afterlife" of the text, in Walter Benjamin's terms.²⁸ H. D.'s relationship to the text-in-translation may be understood as not only living, but "symbiotic."²⁹ Hooley has described this feature of translation as "composite intertextuality" – the generative moment of the translation sees the source text and the new text as "reacting" to one another.³⁰

In this "*terra incognita*," H. D. made distinct interventions. As noted above, one of the ways in which H. D. differed from her predecessors, and other Imagists like Pound and Aldington, was the anthological tendencies in translation. As Eileen Gregory has explained, H. D. saw herself as a translator but did not embark on the kinds of comprehensive translation projects that some modern poets did, opting instead to translate single poems by various classical poets. Gregory argues that "this anomaly – deliberately avoiding ordinary

24 Yao (2002), 96.

25 Friedman (1983), 131.

26 Quoted in Vanderwielen (1992), 63–4.

27 Hooley (1998), 20.

28 Benjamin (1932), 71.

29 Gregory (2012), 152.

30 Hooley (1998), 26.

production in translation, and yet seeing translation as central to her work – reflects the habitual obliquity in her poetic activity. The peculiar status of translation in her writing suggests, paradoxically, the aesthetic, cultural and even religious seriousness with which she took up the task of the translator.”³¹ In this way, H. D. engages in generative acts of translation. As Swann notes, Julia in *Bid Me to Love* gives some insight into the process in remarking that “anyone can translate the meaning of the word. She wanted the shape, the feel of it, the character of it, as if it had been freshly minted. She felt that the old manner of approach was toward hoarded treasure, but treasure that had passed through too many hands, and had been too carefully assessed by the grammarians.”³² These acts of translation also helped H. D. gain access to the Alexandrian/Hellenistic tradition, exemplified in large part by the works of Sappho, which would become a particular hallmark of her poetry.

H. D. and Sappho: Kindred Spirits

It would be difficult to overstate Sappho's influence on H. D. and her writing or the extent to which this has been focused on by literary critics who have sought to recover her work and its place in the modernist canon. As Diana Collecott has convincingly shown, Sappho haunts H. D.'s career, her specter evident in much more than H. D.'s translations of fragments, and “when we realise that Sappho's presence in the work of H. D. is no less solid than Homer's in the work of Pound or Dante's in the work of Eliot, we are on the approach to a fresh understanding of her modernism.”³³

In making parallels between the two poets, critics are often following H. D.'s own cue, as when she writes of Sappho in her essay, “The Wise Sappho,” that “we are inclined to visualize these broken sentences and unfinished rhythms as rocks – perfect rock shelves and layers of rock between which flowers by some chance may grow but which endure when the staunch blossoms have perished.”³⁴ The presence of flowers and rocks, and the formalization of broken sentences and unfinished rhythms suggest H. D.'s own *Sea Garden*. Moreover, as Gregory has suggested, the connection to Sappho can be seen not only in such particulars, but more generally throughout the volume in “a latent mythic presence: Sappho herself, the first love-possessed lyricist, who carries for

31 Gregory (2012), 144.

32 Quoted in Swann (1962), 9.

33 Collecott (1999), 5.

34 H. D. (1982), 58.

H. D. an authority for her own marginal explorations, for her sustained spiritual eroticism."³⁵

It should be noted, though, that H. D.'s is a hard-edged Sappho, whose influence is best seen in Imagistic particulars. This becomes clearer when H. D.'s writing is placed against another Sapphic text, the 1907 *Sappho. Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings*.³⁶ While there are several terms used in high frequency in this text, such as "sea," the term "love" is used in the *Selected Renderings* (either in translation of lines or in discussion of the poet) 126 times. In *Sea Garden* it is not used once. Such an omission says something significant both about modern sexual politics and Imagistic aesthetic principles.

Beyond her personal interest in the poet, H. D.'s embrace of Sappho offers a particular case of how the recovery and re-appraisal of particular classical figures and traditions impacted modern literary production. As Svensson suggests, "before 1906 only two complete poems by Sappho were known. As a result of the excavations performed at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt some ten new fragments were discovered, an event deemed so important that on 14 May, 1914, *The Times* printed one of these fragments in Greek with a prose translation and commentary by J. E. Edmonds, the future editor of the three volumes of Greek lyric, *Lyra Graeca*, included in the Loeb Classical Library."³⁷ The recovery of the Sapphic fragments was such a notable event not only because it contributed substantially to the store of verses, but also, perhaps, because it challenged the notion of the classical tradition as static and calcified. The possibility that new texts could be added to the canon was in tandem with the belief that the engagement with classical texts could substantiate modernist discourses. In invoking Sappho, H. D. participates in this challenge that, as Collecott suggests, "involves a counter-discourse to Victorian Hellenism, one more at ease with the archaic sensuousness of Aegean civilization as portrayed by Symonds than with the masculine austerities of Pater's mainland city-states."³⁸ As such, it is important to extend beyond the particular figure of Sappho to understand Hellenism more generally, and an Alexandrianism that would carry her from her early Imagistic phase to her most ambitious poetic work, *Helen in Egypt* (1961).

35 Gregory (1986), 529.

36 Sappho (1907). The copy in the Bryher library contains H. D.'s owl bookplate, inscribed to H. D. by Bryher: "Boy. Paris. September 5th 1922."

37 Svensson (2003), 115.

38 Collecott (1999), 116.

Beyond Imagism: Hellenism and Alexandrianism

New areas of classical scholarship provided didactic models for historical comparison and aesthetic expression for all students of humanism at the turn of the 20th century. First among these was the emergence of the notion of “Hellenistic” history (*Geschichte des Hellenismus*), first proposed by Johann Gustav Droysen in 1836. Early twentieth-century intellectuals, and modernist poets, found in the Hellenistic period a new inspiration apart from the world of Classical Athens that had provided a model for the late Victorian period.³⁹ This emerging role of the Hellenistic period in classical scholarship influenced the “Alexandrianism” that Gregory suggests was a persistent and integral part of H. D.’s Hellenism.⁴⁰ As the Hellenistic period was bound in a historical narrative of liminality – between the purity of Athens and the power of Rome, and the philosophical brilliance of Plato and the spiritual brilliance of Christianity – so too was this Alexandrianism defined by temporal and cultural poles. As Gregory suggests,

H. D.’s ‘Alexandria’ is the liminal city par excellence, the place and time *between* – between East and West, Troy and Greece; between ancient and modern, Athens and Rome; between body and spirit; between male and female; between intellect and desire; between past and future; between inscription and transcription; between dead and living; between the lost and the recovered. This locus is crucial within H. D.’s imaginative geography of the ancient world as it represents – in relation to ‘Hellas’ – a state of perpetual displacement and origins, of absence and loss, within which one explores to its full limits the power of nostalgia.⁴¹

H. D. embraced the idea of the Alexandrian ethos as defined by displacement. She located within the ambiguity an inherently creative space; H. D.’s Alexandria was, above all, a symbol of the “originality” of the Hellenistic aesthetic, and an analogue for what she saw as “our present-day literary Alexandria.”⁴² Likewise, H. D. embraced the association of Alexandria with the decadent and the effeminate, an idea evident as early as Clement and reinforced through a persistent

39 Svensson (2003), 124.

40 Gregory (1997), 46; for critical discussions of the term “Alexandrianism” see D. Ricks, “Cavafy’s Alexandrianism” and M. Silk, “Alexandrian Poetry from Callimachus to Eliot” in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*.

41 Gregory (1997), 52.

42 Review of *The Farmer’s Bride*, 135; see Gregory (1997), 47.

Orientalizing discourse in the 19th century. As Svensson notes, "H. D. and other early modernists saw the sexual ambiguity often associated with Alexandria as a strength, interpreting the city's alleged decadence as, among other things, an open-mindedness about erotic behavior, including homoeroticism."⁴³

Like the Alexandrian scholars, H. D. incorporated the tropes of established mythology into new poetic narratives. In this task, the poet found a model in Theocritus, who was the subject of her first translations.⁴⁴ In the same way that Homeric mythologies (such as Polyphemus in *Idyll 11*) are reinterpreted by Theocritus, H. D. creates a new imaginative space in her later epic poem, *Helen in Egypt* (1961).⁴⁵ Likewise, as with the Alexandrian poets, *Helen in Egypt* draws upon a source (Stesichorus) to both subvert the dominant narrative (Homer) and to display one's craft and erudition in making the allusion. In addition, the bucolic nature of the Theocritean landscape, particularly as expressed in Andrew Lang's 1889 translation, also carried "a very specific imagistic configuration – a quite Vesuvian sensuousness, a shelter insistent of the spirit. The Theocritean in H. D. is focused not upon spiritual ecstasies but upon 'passionate things of the earth.'"⁴⁶

What is more, the notion of the "Hellenistic" helped to align more closely the history of Egypt with that of the Classical World – a theme central in works such as *Helen in Egypt*. H. D.'s interest in Egypt more generally was made palpable through the establishment of the modern field of Egyptology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The poet had in her library works such as Gosse's *The Civilization of the Ancient Egyptians*, Lucas' *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, Murray's *Ancient Egyptian Legend*, and Breasted's *Ancient Records of Egypt* and *A History of Egypt*. Although her interest in Egypt may have been mediated through the Classics and a distinct Alexandrianism, it is clear that H. D. had an interest in Egypt's pre-Hellenistic past. Indeed, it is possible to see in H. D.'s employment of the archaic – another conspicuous concern for many modernist poets – the way in which the Alexandrian mode could transcend historical categories.⁴⁷ The preoccupation with Sappho, Homeric intertextuality, and Egyptian myth were all viewed through an Alexandrian lens.⁴⁸

43 Svensson (2003), 124.

44 'Autobiographical Notes' (p. 1) entry for 1910. Unpublished typescript in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscripts Library, Yale University.

45 Woodbury (1967).

46 Gregory (1997), 165.

47 On Modernism and the archaic see Haynes (2007), 103–8.

48 On Homer in particular, see Gregory (1997), 173–8.

Conclusion

H. D. has often been considered the best exemplar of Imagism – the “perfect Imagist.”⁴⁹ This epithet has largely been understood as a reflection of H. D.’s poetic method, in particular the use of exactness of imagery and concision of language (following the tenants later put forth in Pound’s “A Few Don’ts” essay and the preface to *Some Imagist Poets*). However, her work also exemplifies the role of the classical tradition within that Imagist movement. Like the other Imagist poets, such as Pound and Aldington, H. D. was influenced by particular aspects of Greek and Latin literature, as informed by classical scholarship in the early 20th century. New editions of ancient texts – like Mackail’s *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* and new fragments of Sappho – not only allowed access to additional works of ancient literature, but they provided new models for translation and the presentation of text. Indeed, a spirit of anthologism largely defines H. D.’s own translation efforts.

Beyond this, it is also possible to locate in H. D.’s literary production a larger discourse concerning modernism and its relationship to the ancient past. This discourse centers on the notions of “Modern Hellenism” and Alexandrianism. H. D. looked upon her own literary production as part of a modern-day literary Alexandria, embracing the inherent liminality engendered in the ancient city and finding in it a creative space defined by originality. Even after the Imagist movement concluded, this particular Hellenism remained a potent force in H. D.’s work and in much of Anglo-American poetry throughout the twentieth century.

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49 On the title and its application to H. D. see Collecott (1999), 135–40.

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Creating the Modern Rhapsode: The Classics as World Literature in Ezra Pound's *Cantos*

Adam J. Goldwyn

Constructing Author(ity): Portraits of Ezra Pound in the Epigraphs to *The Waste Land*

For the original version of *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot chose as an epigraph the famous closing lines of his older contemporary Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than breath – ‘The horror! the horror!’¹

In this epigraph, Eliot uses Conrad to characterize his friend and fellow poet Ezra Pound, the poem's dedicatee: Pound both assumes the role of and replaces Kurtz, the enigmatic figure at the center of *Heart of Darkness*, as the speaker in the epigraph. By 1922, Pound had become best known as the founder of Imagism, one of the early avant-gardes of Anglo-American poetry that flourished between 1912 and 1917, and thus Eliot citing Conrad's "image" was no doubt a marked and recognizable use to Pound. Kurtz's utterance thus becomes Pound's declaration of his poetic vision ("The horror! the horror!"). The epigraph, moreover, parallels Pound's own definition of Imagism and poetry itself from his early aesthetic treatise "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1913): "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Pound's description of poetic epiphany parallels Conrad's "supreme moment of complete knowledge."

The use of *Heart of Darkness* as an intertext also functions as a fitting introduction to a poem with such dystopian ambition: Eliot recognized in Kurtz's final utterance his own vision of the modern world as a waste land, a vision of

¹ Eliot (2005), 76.

decay and hopelessness he shared with Pound. Through a complicated process of intertextuality and abstruse verbal allusions, Eliot compresses himself, Pound, Conrad, Kurtz and their various worldviews into a seamless polyvalent image, a motto as much for *The Waste Land* as for modernism itself.

And yet, after reading a draft of the poem, Pound wrote a letter on January 24, 1922 expressing his dissatisfaction with the epigraph and suggesting Eliot change it: "I doubt if Conrad is weighty enough to stand the citation."² In the published version Eliot did heed Pound's critique and replaced Conrad's words with an epigraph taken from the first century Latin prose text, *Petronius' Satyricon*. This change suggests both Pound's and Eliot's perspectives on the aesthetics and craft of poetry in the modern world, their relationship with one another, their identities as authors and authorial personae and, as importantly, their reception of the (Classical) past.

Pound's objection to the epigraph is based in neither aesthetics nor ideology. He does not object to Kurtz's dystopian vision – indeed, that he shared it was no doubt among Eliot's principal reasons for choosing the line – rather, he objects to a much more amorphous characteristic: what he calls its "weight." An epigraph by a contemporary Polish-born novelist writing in English – no matter how lauded by his contemporaries – not only lacked the gravitas to give Eliot's modernist masterpiece the stature of the ancient and medieval antecedents that are so deeply embedded in the poem's architecture, it also lacked the power to properly position the poem's dedicatee within the pantheon of canonical writers alongside whom he wished to reside – such as Homer, Virgil, and Dante – at a moment in his creative life when he had just begun serious work on the epic work which would occupy him for the remainder of his life, *The Cantos*.³ Though the first epigraph and the one that replaced it shared the tripartite function of introducing the subject matter of *The Waste Land*, offering a portrait of Pound, and articulating a programmatic statement on modernism's dystopian gaze, the second epigraph, which has appeared in all subsequent published versions, better reflected both the intertextual

2 Eliot (2005), 76.

3 Froula considers "the question of the poem's form in its dimensions as a modern epic [...] perhaps the largest problem in Pound's studies." (1984), 7. That Pound sought a place alongside writers of epic is demonstration enough of his commitment to writing in the genre, whatever its formal or structural identifiers may be. Among the many problems in determining Pound's own view on the subject is that his views changed over the course of his lifetime, a lifetime devoted in large part to first conceiving of, then executing and revising, an epic project, with frequent extra-textual comments in the form of letters, critical writings and his interlocutors' recollections of his various utterances.

allusiveness of Pound's and Eliot's poetics and thematics⁴ and better positioned Pound among the world-historical writers he considered his peers:

Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla
pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat
illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.

For Ezra Pound
*il miglior fabbro*⁵

[For on one occasion I myself saw, with my own eyes, the Cumaean Sibyl
hanging in a cage, and when some boys said to her, "Sibyl, what do you
want?" she replied, "I want to die."

For Ezra Pound
the better craftsman]⁶

Eliot's new epigraph draws from a text much deeper in the Classical past: Eliot now quotes the first century CE Roman writer Petronius. The new epigraph suggests that Eliot's work no longer be read in the tradition of Conrad and the modern English novel, but rather through Petronius and through the ancient epic, that most esteemed of genres. Significantly, Eliot did not choose one of the great epic writers themselves, but rather, one who is more like Pound: a later imitator and practitioner of the genre in a new idiom. The lines Eliot chose from Petronius about the Cumaean Sibyl allude to a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which themselves allude to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Further complicating the already densely allusive layering of time, authorship, and referent, the lines from *The Satyricon* are not in the narrator's voice, but rather in the voice of his most blustering character, Trimalchio, for whom this speech is "partly a species of braggadocio and may even be a lie, and it is partly an excuse for him to prove that he can speak, as well as read, Greek."⁷ Trimalchio, too, serves as a proto-Pound: a non-elite from the colonized periphery of the empire (Pound was born and spent his first eight years in Hailey, Idaho; he spent the next fifteen years in Pennsylvania and moved to Europe at 23) who makes his way to

4 As well as those of their friends and fellow modernist epic writers H. D. and James Joyce.

5 Eliot (2005), 57.

6 Eliot (2005), 75.

7 Eliot (2005), 75.

its center and who feels the need to tell – in first person narration – stories which both give his life an epic cast and prove his educational bona fides.

Eliot's epigraph thus places both his poem and its dedicatee in the tradition of ancient epic and ancient mock epic, with Pound-as-writer in the role of the epic poet and Pound-as-exile in the role of the epic hero. And yet, the essential message of this new epigraph is the same: like Kurtz, the Cumaean Sybil looks out upon the world and expresses a sentiment in line with the central dystopian theme of *The Waste Land*. As Kurtz sees "the horror," the Sybil, when she looks around her, is similarly grim: she only wants to die. Both epigraphs feature characters who despair when surveying the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," the description of modernity Eliot attributed to Joyce's *Ulysses* but which has long been recognized as equally (if not more) apt a description of Eliot's own view in *The Waste Land*.⁸

Dispensing with the modern novelistic tradition in English as represented by Conrad in the first epigraph, the second epigraph better represents both Pound's and Eliot's approaches to language; it mimics in miniature the polyglot and allusive style of *The Waste Land* and Pound's own later modernist epic *The Cantos*. The four languages of the epigraph themselves suggest a history of the epic tradition: the first part in the language of ancient epic, that is, Greek and Latin, the second part in one of the languages of medieval epic, that is, Italian, while only a single word – though the only word actually necessary for a dedication – "for," is in English.⁹

As with the rest of the epigraph, the Italian phrase "il miglior fabbro" [the better craftsman] is itself a complicated piece of intertext.¹⁰ Its polysemous allusiveness summons the relation of the ancient and medieval worlds to the modern, Eliot and Pound to their predecessors in epic, and Eliot and Pound to one another. All of this happens implicitly within the subtext of the three otherwise innocuous words with which Dante praises the Provençal troubadour

8 Eliot (1975), 177. See Longenbeach (1987) for an analysis of Pound's and Eliot's views on the relationship between history and poetry and on the broader Anglo-American historiographical context in which they were embedded.

9 If one excludes (or considers as English) the dedicatee's own name, with the first name deriving from Hebrew and the surname an English formulation of the Latin *pondo*).

10 Blanton (2015), 23 notes that Eliot wrote this by hand on the copy he delivered to Pound. He later argues for the chain of personae within the allusion, noting that it "recall[s] Pound without naming him, instead inserting him within a chain of allusions that the poets suddenly share: Sordello, Arnaut, Dante, Browning." Blanton (2015), 66. He also connects the importance of "the knowing joke between Pound and Eliot" with "a wise nod to the revolutionary force of vernacular language, in a line that, like Petronius's epigraph, quotes across tongues." Blanton (2015), 64.

Arnaut Daniel in *Purgatorio* 26. The lines suggest Eliot's gratitude towards Pound for his help with editing the poem and his praise of Pound's poetry more generally. But this seeming praise also reveals the competition between the two poets: since today Dante is indisputably considered the better craftsman, Eliot's assumption of the role of Dante – Pound's literary idol – puts Pound in the position of the earlier inferior poet, an inside joke with a bite.¹¹

But the attribution is not wholly in jest; it also reflects serious aspects of Pound's poetics. Pound had written an article on Daniel in 1920 in which he praised the Provençal poet for his knowledge of both the vernacular Langue d'Oc and Latin, as well as for adding modern stylistic innovation and linguistic experimentation in his emulation of writers such as Ovid and Virgil. Pound praises Daniel for his unusual rhyme scheme, uneven line-length, and for "ma[king] the first piece of 'blank-verse.'"¹² Daniel, a literary descendant of the great Latin epic poets and forerunner of Dante, the great medieval poet, also becomes Pound's medieval double and the literary ancestor whose own method of Classical reception most closely mirrored Pound's own; Eliot knew his friend well, and knew just where he viewed himself in the genealogy of epic poets. Indeed, Pound's description of Daniel as writing "when the Provençal [language] was growing weary, and it was to be seen if it could last, and [he] tried to make almost a new language, or at least to enlarge the Langue d'Oc, and make new things possible" echoes Pound's own famous desire to "make it new" – the "it" in Pound's case being the English language and English literary tradition. Indeed, even to speak of *The Cantos* as a poem in English is itself a limited perspective: whole cantos are written in Italian or Chinese, and innumerable sentences combine so many different languages and alphabets, some in translation, some in transliteration, and some in the original, that they can only be seen as part of Pound's desire, like Daniel, to create a new global language. Thus, Pound's Daniel is, if not autobiography transposed onto a historical figure, at least an explanation of his own poetics through a figure from the past.

And therein lies the key to understanding (Classical) reception in the work of Ezra Pound.¹³ His portrait of Daniel and his views of Daniel's poetics and historical and literary contexts are not meant to inform the reader about

11 Pound had also translated Arnaut's poetry, and had praised him in his 1910 survey of Western literature, *The Spirit of Romance*.

12 Pound (1968), 109. For Pound and "The Politics of Free Verse" for the Modernists, see Whalan (2014), esp. 679–80.

13 And his fellow writers of modernist epic like Eliot, H. D., and James Joyce. For which, see Whittier-Ferguson (2010).

Daniel, but to inform the reader about Pound. Eliot understood that the same principle applied to Pound's translations as well; in his review of Pound's English rendering of the poetry of the first century BCE Latin writer Sextus Propertius in 1928, he writes: "It is not a translation, it is a paraphrase, or still more truly (for the instructed) a persona."¹⁴ Stuart Gillespie's gloss on this line suggests the similarity between Pound's persona-making strategy in his translations and his critical work: "What Eliot meant was that by filtering and emphasizing what he chose, Pound had made Propertius into a vehicle, a spokesman for himself."¹⁵ As Pound was Eliot's best reader, so too was Eliot Pound's: here he acknowledges that Pound's translation strategy, as in his critical and biographical writing, is less a reader-oriented practice of making works in foreign languages comprehensible and more an author-centered practice of constructing a particular vision of the translator.

Translation and criticism are how Pound creates his personae variously as troubadour or rhapsode, personae which he deploys in *The Cantos*. This synthesis is also central to Pound's poetics: like the second epigraph of *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos* is constructed through the interweaving of fragments of both untranslated and translated ancient literature with new composition. This method in effect foregrounds Pound's multiple personae in the poem: he is variously poet, translator, memoirist, historian, hero, biographer and autobiographer all at the same time.

Authorial Personae and Temporal Simultaneity in *The Cantos*

The months during which the two poets debated epigraphs were crucial for Pound's own artistic development; it was during this period that he was editing both *The Waste Land* and reading *Ulysses* that he broke through his own creative barrier, discarding the earliest sections of *The Cantos* and composing those that would first appear in book form in 1925. Eliot would no doubt have recognized the change in his friend's perspective. Thus, in reflecting this vision of Pound's poetics in the second epigraph, Eliot also opens up a window into the ideas that informed his and Pound's similar conception of how modern people experience history in the present. Pound is both Virgil and Aeneas, both

14 Like so many lines in their oeuvres, this line has featured prominently in many studies of Eliot and Pound, such as Hughes (1931), 243; Yao (2002), 53; Gillespie (2011), 24.

15 Gillespie (2011), 24. Gillespie goes on to note the various ways in which Classicists who recognized Pound's having done this rebuked him for it, as well as Pound's subsequent defense of this practice.

Dante and Daniel, indeed, both Eliot and Pound. He is a writer in experimental modern English as well as a writer in the dead prestige languages of Greek and Latin; indeed, Pound's modern English becomes (or returns to its original state as) a hybrid amalgamation of ancient and medieval vocabulary and syntax. The historical or temporal strata simply cannot be separated from one another: all exist simultaneously within Pound's new English poetic register – one which, incidentally, stands in sharp contrast to his early poetry, with its stilted imitation of Robert Browning's nineteenth-century idiom.

In both his critical writings and his letters, Pound wrestles from the perspective of theory and method with how to imbue his poem with this sense of the simultaneity of all times overlapping with one another in the present moment. In "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," he had argued that in poetry, "It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits."¹⁶ This last part reflects Pound's enduring belief that adhering to traditional artificial constructs of linear time and space inhibit the poet's capacity: freedom means the capacity to inhabit within the work all times and spaces simultaneously. Some twenty-five years later, Pound articulated this same idea of time and space in different terms. In his 1938 essay *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound argues that "We do NOT know the past in chronological sequence. It may be convenient to lay it out anesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there, but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our time."¹⁷ For Pound (and for Eliot), the experience of the presence of the past could not be represented in literature in a linear or chronological fashion: Pound's metaphor of ripples and spirals suggests the experience of confronting the present in poetry as an encounter with all pasts at all moments, or, as James Longenbeach says, "For both these poets the present is nothing more than the sum of the entire past – a palimpsest, a complex tissue of historical remnants."¹⁸

Such an insight is equally reflected in *The Waste Land*, when the narrator stands on the banks of the River Thames and thinks to himself: "Unreal City, |

16 Pound (1913), 200.

17 Pound (1938), 60. For the connection of this line with Joyce, see Spoo (1994), 50; for the connection with Eliot, see Patea (2006), 59.

18 Longenbeach (1987), 12 connects this with Joyce, for whom "The poignancy of the ['The Dead'] is the realization that the dead are living still" as expressed in the scene in which "Gabriel realizes that he 'had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. [...] the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.'" For Joyce, this moment of epiphany reveals the simultaneity of all time periods, the concurrent living and dying of all peoples past, present, and future.

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, | A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, | I had not thought death had undone so many.”¹⁹ In alluding here to the scene from *Inferno* III, Eliot makes the comparison between Dante’s medieval Florentine underworld and the hellscape that is postwar London. But Eliot’s comparison of himself with Dante in the epigraph suggests another aspect of his poetics with regards to translation: as a translator of Dante, Eliot becomes Dante the author, while as a first-person narrator gazing out at the dead, Eliot becomes Dante the character in *The Inferno* as well: the Dante of the modern world.²⁰ The representation of the simultaneity of the living and dead, then, is a feature both of their critical thought and their poetic work and it is perhaps no coincidence either that both writers drew on the myth of Odysseus to frame these insights in their masterpieces: the ghosts of Odysseus and his underworld interlocutor Tiresias – both mediators between the world of the dead and the world of the living – flow through *The Waste Land*, as well as *The Cantos*.²¹

It was this historical sensibility, the compression of all periods into an all-encompassing present, that motivated Pound’s Classical reception, and the opening lines of *The Cantos* bring this compression to life by summoning the ghosts of multiple epic traditions. The opening lines are programmatic in this regard, synthesizing the Greco-Latin and the Anglo-Saxon tradition, thus fashioning a new modernist epic idiom:

And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also

19 Eliot (1975), 60–3.

20 The earliest first-person narrator, of course, was none other than Odysseus himself, whom Dante followed by turning this first-person narration of wandering into allegorical spiritual autobiography. Pound toys with these notions again: he, too, is writing a kind of spiritual autobiography, but for him Odysseus’ voice – when translated into English – is his own autobiographical verse.

21 These ideas are even more pronounced in *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939. In the seventeen years since the publication of *Ulysses*, Joyce had expanded his ideas about reception in ways parallel to Pound’s: Joyce no longer sought to incorporate just the Greek tradition, but the entirety of the world compressed together: the River Liffy runs through the Garden of Eden and Dublin at the same time, and the audacious “bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooohoor-denenthurnuk,” Joyce’s onomatopoeia for the fall of man which combines the word for thunder in a dozen or more languages, domesticating them into a Modernist novel (epic?) ostensibly in English. Joyce (1939), 5. Flack (2015) engages with the reception of Homer in a variety of Modernist works, including Pound and Eliot as well as H. D., Joyce, and others.

Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
 Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,
 Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess
 Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,
 Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day's end
 Sun to his slumber, shadows o'er all the ocean,
 Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,
 To the Kimmerian lands, and peopled cities.²²

From its opening lines, Pound positions *The Cantos* in its Classical (and, via Dante's use of similar techniques, medieval) literary tradition through the use of recognizable epic motifs. It begins in medias res, with the temporal deixis "and then" without antecedent suggesting previous events not narrated. Allusions to *The Odyssey* specifically are made through recognizably epic subject matter such as the description of the preparations for setting sail as well through explicit references such as "Circe's ship" and "The Kimmerian lands." Finally, Pound pitches his work in an epic register, as, for instance, when he uses Homeric epithets like "the godly sea" and "the trim-coiffed goddess." These aspects create the impression of epic without needing to specifically identify the opening passage as a translation of Odysseus' underworld voyage in Book 11.

Significantly, however, the opening of *The Cantos* is not exclusively a summoning of Homeric ghosts; in its use of metrical structure and alliteration, it also alludes to an alternate tradition of epic wholly independent of Greco-Roman influence: Old English epic poetry.²³ Pound himself had rendered into modern English part of the Old English poem *The Seafarer* (an Old English poem usually dated to the second half of the tenth century CE that survives in fragmentary form in a collection called *The Exeter Book*), and the verbal and metrical echoes between his retelling of Odysseus setting sail with the voyage in *The Seafarer* suggest his attempt to fuse together the ancient Greek and the Old English epic strands of his literary inheritance.²⁴

22 Pound discusses his use of Andreas Divus, about whom more below, and his translation strategy for this passage in Pound (1968), 259–67, though without reference to the interpolation of Old English poetics.

23 For a detailed analysis of the metrical structure of Canto 1, see Henriksen (2006), 283–4. For the broader implications of "modernism's great impresario" as "a frustrated medievalist," see Scanlon (2010), 838.

24 For Dante's metaphorical description of himself as seafarer, see Henriksen (2006), 80–1, in which he also mentions Pound's pun on "craft" as sailing ship and as poetic technique in line 5 of Canto 1.

Pound's rendering of the structural and poetic affinities between the two poems, moreover, reflect their affinity in subject matter. According to Andre Furlani, Pound "found in the Old English seafarer a North Sea Odysseus. [...] And when this seafarer extols a vanished age of heroes (ll. 82–7), he is very much a modernist hailing the primary energies of the archaic."²⁵ In his critical writing on Daniel and in his translation of Sextus Propertius, Pound had created personae reflecting his own self-image, and this same method of historical reception informs his poetry as well: Odysseus and the anonymous poet of *The Seafarer* (as well as the seafarer himself) are similarly synthesized representations of Pound.

In beginning his epic with the *nekuia*, Pound implicitly connects Odysseus' trip to the underworld with his own poetic practice of Classical reception: like Odysseus, Pound summons and, significantly, give voice to ghosts. Pound demands a meditation on how the dead are made to speak, that is, how the past can exist in the present:²⁶

And drawing sword from my hip
 I dug the ell-square pitkin,
 Poured we libations unto each the dead,
 First mead and then sweet wine, water mixed with white flour
 Then prayed I many a prayer to the sickly death's-heads,
 As set in Ithaca,
 sterile bulls of the best
 For sacrifice, heaping the pyre with goods,
 A sheep to Tiresias only, black and a bell-sheep
 Dark blood flowed in the fosse.²⁷

In choosing this episode, the poet offers a programmatic statement about the purpose and meaning of his modern epic. The "I" here is both the hero Odysseus and Pound the poet, both of whom make the dead speak in poetry. According to Furlani: "Pound's aim is renovation. Translation here is *nekuia*: By giving blood to the dead, the dead may disclose futurity and possibility."²⁸

25 Furlani (2005), 13.

26 For Pound's "metaphorics of death," that is, the frequency with which he refers to himself as an exhumers of corpses and his belief in writing poetry as a form of resurrection, see Tiffany (1995), 117, who calls this the poet's "cryptaesthetic."

27 Pound (1975), 3.

28 Furlani (2005), 13.

Thus, Pound's opening fragment also comments on translation and, indirectly, Classical reception as praxis: it is a process of mediated resurrection *ad infinitum*. Through the sacrifices in the underworld narrated in Canto 1, Odysseus enables the ghosts to speak again. But Odysseus (and Homer) can only speak through their translator, Pound. Pound thus becomes both Odysseus²⁹ and Homer, a point emphasized by Pound's (via Odysseus's) use of first person narration.

Pound thus also becomes a participant in the tradition of writing about Odysseus that begins with Homer and culminates in himself, with the great chain including not just ancient authors like Sophocles and Euripides, medieval authors such as Chaucer and Dante, and Renaissance authors such as Shakespeare, but also literary translators such as Chapman, Pope, Dryden – not bad company for an author as concerned as Pound was with his place in the canon. As a writer whose work integrates fragments of translations of both *The Odyssey* and *The Seafarer*, he performs a kind of poetic *nekuia*: giving voice to dead poets through translation of dead languages and resurrecting them into a modern epic idiom. Since this passage of *The Cantos* is written in first-person narration, moreover, he is also like the heroes of epics: both Odysseus and the seafarer tell their own stories. Pound thus assumes the role of epic poet and epic hero.

After Tiresias prophesies to Odysseus, the tone of the poem shifts; Pound's narratorial voice “step[s] back,” that is, separates himself to identify the translation he has used to open *The Cantos*:

And I stepped back,
And he strong with the blood, said then “Odysseus
“Shalt return through spiteful Neptune, over dark seas,
“Lose all companions” And then Anticlea came
Lie quiet Divus I mean, that is Andreas Divus,
In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer
And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away
And unto Circe

29 Doria (1973/4), 132 notes the impossibility of even identifying Odysseus, whom he calls “The first and ever-recurring persona of the *Cantos*”: “Which Odysseus are we supposed to think of when we read the *Cantos*? [...] In some ways we feel the Odysseus of Canto 1 both is and is not the Odysseus of ‘Canto 95.’ Pound’s Odysseus is open-ended; he grows, changes, and endures in hypostasis with Pound.”

Venerandam,
 In the Cretan's phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,
 Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, orichalchi, with golden
 Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids
 Bearing the golden bough of Argicida So that:³⁰

The same compression of time, language, and personae are evident in the closing lines of Canto 1: John Steven Childs notes that the "I" in the first and fifth lines of the passage refer to both Odysseus and Pound, a feature he calls the "condensation [...] of personae."³¹ The pace of these intertextual and trans-temporal affiliations accelerates throughout the end of the passage. "There are a number of speakers here," writes Childs, "Homer, Divus, the Anglo-Saxon poet [of the Seafarer], Odysseus, Tiresias, and a fussy, mock-scholarly commentator who is only one of several specifically Poundian personae."³² Childs concludes his list of speakers by proposing that "a new persona, whom one might call the 'real' Pound, surfaces in the canto's final, fragmented 'So that:'" who continues to narrate into Canto 2.³³ Childs is right to identify the numerous speakers and personae adopted by Pound, but his "real Pound" must not be seen as separate from these other voices; rather, the "real Pound" is the sum of the voices of past heroes, past writers, past scholars. Pound, after all, considered himself all three.

Of these identities, however, Andreas Divus, the first translator of Homer into Latin, merits special consideration. Pound looked to him as another literary ancestor and dedicated a section of his essay "Early Translators of Homer" to him.³⁴ Much of the essay, ostensibly on Divus' translation praxis, is actually a discussion of Pound's, and Pound uses it as a chance to explain his own choices. That Divus, like Pound, came to Paris to pursue his literary success –

30 For a semiotic analysis of the passage, see Childs (1986), 28–32. For a discussion of the passage's "counter-chronological sequence" and how Pound "reveal[s] an overlay of times, places, voices, and roles" see Lewis (2010), 58.

31 Childs (1986), 30. Pound's play on the very notion can be seen in his choice of name for his 1909 collection: *Personae*.

32 Childs (1986), 30.

33 Henriksen parses the referents of the various uses of first-person narrative markers in the opening cantos to point to the further proliferation of voices and personae: "In Canto 1, Pound pointed to the text from which he was translating Homer with the line 'I mean, that is Andreas Divus'; in Canto 2, he used the first- person possessive pronoun in another discussion with Browning: 'But Sordello, and my Sordello?' In Pound's text, the poet's 'I' has so far appeared as the voice of an editor or possibly as that of the poem itself – as an 'I' above and in control of the text, but not as a figure within it. In Canto 3, this 'I' appears with a body." Henriksen (2006), 110.

34 Pound (1968), 249.

the essay opens with Pound describing the fortuitous circumstances under which he found Divus's translation "on the Paris quai" – cements the biographical parallel and also explains why Pound includes the seemingly irrelevant detail "in officina Wecheli" in Canto 1: it identifies Divus's Paris-based publishing house, a detail given further weight when considered in light of the publication history of *The Cantos*, which were also published in Paris.³⁵

As the first Latin translator of Homer's Greek, Divus is also a corollary figure to Pound's great inspiration, Dante. Dante's method of Classical reception was one which prioritized creative re-imagination, while Divus was not just a translator, but a particularly literal one. For Pound, Divus' and Dante's methods of Classical reception are antithetical, and yet his poetics and method of Classical reception became a synthesis of the translation and creative re-imagination which they represent. Thus, while in his title he alludes to the great Florentine, the man who reinvented the Classical tradition in his own era and represents most fully its themes, structure, and, above all, its ambitions, in the opening of the poem itself he references the man who first translated Homer into Latin, the universal language of Renaissance Europe. Pound thus signals that reception via translation is as central to his method as reception via innovation. Indeed, Canto 1 represents the synthesis of these two: Pound is creating a new work of imaginative epic poetry, but doing so through translation.

Indeed, incorporating translation and creative re-imagination into a modernist epic becomes the principal concern of the closing section of Canto 1. In the section quoted above, Pound synthesizes Anglo-Saxon with Greco-Latin epic traditions, in part by structuring the poem according to the "bob and wheel" structure of Middle English verse as exemplified by *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The "bob and wheel" structure consists of a short indented line followed by longer lines. Thus, Pound creates the four-syllable short line "And I stepped back" as the bob followed by seven lines consisting of the wheel; this structure is then repeated in the four syllable bob "venerandam" and a wheel consisting of the closing quatrain.

The final bob and wheel shows a marked shift in language, a shift emphasized by Pound's use of the Middle English structure: the bob consists of a single word – the only word which stands alone on a line in the canto – "venerandam" ("worthy of veneration"). The word is marked not only by its strong placement as a bob, but also by its strangeness: excluding proper nouns, *venerandam* is the first identifiably non-English word in *The Cantos*. Pound here demonstrates his

35 For a further discussion of why Pound chose *Odyssey* 11 (Pound believed it to be older than the rest of the *Odyssey* and thus the oldest piece of European literature) and Divus ("In the act of feeling his way back through the voices of Andreas and Homer, Pound is clearing space for his own – an ambitious gesture"), see also Ricks (1989), 143.

affinity with Divus by foregrounding his own act of translation: “venerandam” evokes Venus, the Latin name of the Greek goddess whose name appears in the first line of the wheel, Aphrodite,³⁶ as well as quite possibly Dante’s Beatrice, who to him was worthy of veneration in *The Divine Comedy*.

Building upon the blurring of languages he has begun to introduce, the lines after “venerandam” contain words from so many other languages that it would be somewhat inaccurate to call it English. Pound begins with the Latin words “Cypri munimenta sortita est,” which is followed by the English via Anglo-Saxon “mirthful,” representations of the two literary traditions from which Pound has thus far drawn. The remainder of the line consists of the transliterated Greek “orichalchi,” a precious metal (and possibly an alloy of gold) that is the Greek analogue of the English via Anglo-Saxon “golden” at the end of the line.

As in Eliot’s polyglot epigraph to *The Waste Land* the concluding lines of Canto 1 should not be seen as strictly English – indeed that Eliot switched from a monoglot to a polyglot epigraph indicates a rejection of just such a position. Rather they should be seen as the beginnings of the formation of a new epic language combining fragments of multiple languages.

Classical Reception as a Poundian Model of World Literature

Pound’s method of Classical Greek and medieval Anglo-Saxon reception in Canto 1 is programmatic. It offers insight into his much greater ambition of incorporating all of world literature into *The Cantos*: he uses the same method of reception – the poetics of fragmentation, the compression of time and space, the multiplicity of personae – for these two literary traditions as for early American epistolography (as in cantos 32–4), Chinese and Japanese ideograms, African folklore and varied and eclectic other traditions. Indeed, to speak of Classical reception in *The Cantos* would be to fundamentally misread the work as a unified whole: Classical intertexts in *The Cantos* cannot be read as isolated figures, but only as part of the dense network of global literary intertexts which comprise Pound’s vision of world literature.

These global aspirations can be seen in the “Pisan Cantos,” written in 1945 while Pound was in the US Army’s Disciplinary Training Center in Pisa (i.e. a military prison) for his vocal and enthusiastic advocacy of the Fascists. For instance, Pound eulogizes his friend Benito Mussolini, whose death shattered Pound’s hopes for political and economic reforms:

36 Childs (1986), 30.

The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent
shoulders

Manes' Manes was tanned and stuffed, Thus Ben and la Clara a Milano
by the heels at Milano

That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock
DIGONOS, Δίγονος, but the twice crucified

where in history will you find it?³⁷

Pound's principal concern is "the enormous tragedy of the dream," the death of Mussolini and thus end of his hopes for Fascist Italy, and he communicates this through a dense network of historical allusions characterizing the dictator. He is first Manes "tanned and stuffed," a reference to the religious prophet and founder of Manicheism, who was crucified.³⁸ The reference is made explicit: "Thus Ben and la Clara a Milano | by the heels," a reference to the execution of Mussolini and his mistress, whose corpses were hung by the feet in Milan. Mussolini is then the sacrificial bull of ancient Greek rite and, lastly, a Christ figure, but one who suffered even more because he was crucified twice.³⁹ Pound thus compresses diverse pasts – Persian, ancient Greek, Hellenistic North Africa and Roman Palestine – into a single image meant to compress various unjustly murdered figures into the figure of a contemporary. But Pound does not focus this scene through a Western intertext, but rather through the Eastern frame of the Tao: the references to the wind⁴⁰ and the Kiang and Han rivers in the ensuing lines reflect the Chinese influence.

Pound then turns back to himself via his Odyssean persona: ("OY TIE, OY TIE? Odysseus | the name of my family"),⁴¹ which leads to a reference to his own predicament ("Oh my England | that free speech without free radio speech is as zero") and a general lamentation for the post-War dystopia he saw ("and the Constitution in jeopardy | and that state of things not very new either").⁴² Pound's reference to Odysseus marks a return to the poet's self-referential persona-making. In the ensuing lines, he repeats his affiliation with Odysseus as in Canto 1, but then expands the scope of his allusions:

37 Pound (1975), 425.

38 This and the ensuing references are found in Terrell (1984), 362.

39 Terrell notes that this is because Mussolini "was first shot and then hanged." (1984), 362.

40 Terrell identifies other Taoist keywords in the section, such as "process" and "precise definition." (1984), 632–3.

41 Pound (1975), 425.

42 Pound (1975), 426.

and Rouse found they spoke of Elias
 in telling the tales of Oysseus OY TIS
 OY TIS

"I am noman, my name is noman
 but Wanjina is, shall we say, Ouan Jin
 or the man with an education
 and whose mouth was removed by his father
 because he had made too many *things*
 whereby cluttered the bushman's baggage⁴³

Rouse is another translator of Homer, but he differs from Andreas Divus in that he translated not just western languages, but also East Indian literature.⁴⁴ Wanjina marks, then, this shift to the East; a figure from Australian folklore, he created the world through giving names to things, but his divine father (as Pound narrates rather clearly), seeing him create too much, silenced him. Wanjina is thus Pound who, as a poet who was silenced by the US, is a creator of words who was also silenced. Not through either translation or transliteration, but through some as yet unnamed process of language transfer, the Pound plays on the phonetics of the aboriginal name, Wanjina, to make it Ouan Jin, to Chinese ideograms which he then translates to create an epithet for both Wanjina and himself: "the man with an education."⁴⁵ As Mussolini was represented by victims from a global swath of times and places, so too is Pound. He is still Odysseus, the famous figure of Greek mythology, but now he is also a figure of Australian aboriginal mythology, Wanjina, as well as a wholly invented Chinese epithet. Pound has broadened his storehouse of analogous personae, and his method of reception reflects this.

43 Pound (1975), 426–7.

44 Terrell (1984), 365.

45 Perloff describes the subtleties of the language change and its different referents in detail: "Wanjina, we know, is a proper name but Ouan Jin (*wen ren* in contemporary Chinese) is, as Yunte Huang has pointed out to me, nobody's name, only a category. The two-character phrase means "literatus" (or "literata," depending on the context). So Pound's lines actually say, "but Wanjina is, shall we say, a literatus / or the man with an education." But in calling Wanjina "Ouan Jin" and then adding "*the* man with an education" (where we would expect "*a* man"), Pound, as Huang observes, "makes Ouan Jin sound like someone's name, a character in Chinese history, a counterpart of Australia's Wanjina. [...] What is originally a category is now made a proper name. The verbal trick is actually quite astounding." (2004), 58.

Indeed, this compression of personae is represented geographically too: “from the death cells in sight of Mt Taishan @ Pisa | as Fujiyama at Gardone.”⁴⁶ Here he imagines the view of Pisa from his prison cell as the sacred Chinese mountain of Taishan, and the Italian town of Gardone becomes the sacred Japanese Mount Fuji; that Italian towns thus become Eastern mountains are a reflection of the way in which Pound, though locked in a prison cell with only a few books, is still able to move freely throughout the world, throughout time and space, and the way in which time and space blend together as they collapse in on one another.

This seamless collapsing of all past times into the current time, of all places into the current place, of all people into current people, is also represented linguistically. In Canto 1, Pound's description of Odysseus' trip to the underworld was mimicked linguistically, as the poet describes the nekuia through the seamless interweaving of the dead languages of Old and Middle English and Greek and Latin into a new living modern language suitable which was a suitable vehicle for the resurrection of the dead genre of epic. In the "Pisan Cantos," Pound quotes from both *The Odyssey* and *The Seafarer* as well as many more languages than just Greek and English:

“Se casco” said Bianca Capello,
“non casco in ginnocchion”

and with one day's reading a man may have the key in his hands
Lute of Gassir Hooo Fasa

came a lion-coloured pup bringing fleas

and a bird with white markings, a stepper
under les six potences

Absouldre, que tous nous vueil absoudre
lay there Barabbas and two thieves lay beside him
infantile synthesis in Barabbas

minus Hemingway, minus Antheil, ebullient.⁴⁷

Pound moves back and forth between Italian, Soninke (the language of the empire of Ghana, which flourished circa 750–1250, and still spoken in

46 Pound (1975), 427.

47 Pound (1975), 427.

Mauritania), French and Greek, and English works marked as Greek (“synthesis”), Latin (“minus”) and Hebrew (“Barabbas”), creating a new language out of many different languages, some transcribed, some translated, some left in the original. This linguistic practice stretches over the whole of *The Cantos*; indeed, Pound’s famous use of ideograms as well as writing in other alphabets, such as Greek and Arabic, are not represented here, nor are the pictures of, for instance, the globe and the crescent moon at the end of Canto 112). *The Cantos* is a poem of global ambition, drawing from global culture, literature, and history; Pound needed also to invent a new global language to represent this global subject matter. The language of *The Cantos*, then, matches Pound’s method of reception through compression at the levels of authorial persona, history, and geography: all are woven seamlessly together to create something new.

In a letter to James Joyce from London dated 12 December 1918, Pound uttered the oft-quoted lament that “he is perhaps better at digging up corpses of let us say Li Po, or more lately Sextus Propertius, than in preserving this bitched mess of modernity.”⁴⁸ He didn’t know it at the time, but these would become the essential aspects of the epic poetics he cultivated throughout *The Cantos*: to resurrect and synthesize the literature of the past, both canonically Classical and global, through both translation (and transliteration and non-translation) and original composition. When in the notes for the final cantos, he writes: “The dreams clash | and are shattered – | and that I tried to make a paradise | terrestre,” he is not only referring to Dante, but to what he has learned over his decades of writing modernist epic. The etymology of rhapsode, the Greek word for the epic poet himself, is a stitcher together of song fragments (“the shattered dreams” into a unified whole “paradise terrestre”), and Pound as rhapsode reconfigured the fragments to reflect the new world he saw taking shape, one which may have the Classics as its foundation, but one which must ultimately encompass the entirety of the globe and all its literary traditions. Pound thus offers himself as a modern version of the idea of the authorless epic – the sum total of the fragmentary voices of past poets fused together – an idea, incidentally, that had gained widespread acceptance during the period of Pound’s work on *The Cantos* in light of the work of Millman Parry and Alfred Lord on the oral formulaic aspects of Homeric composition. When the cultural figures like Homer are negated and their voices fragmented, when political figures who sought to unite the fragmentary political landscape under a single imperial authority are hanged and shot

48 Another famous line of Ezra Pound’s, which has been cited in much scholarship: Read (1970), 148. For this oft-quoted line, see for instance Stock (1970), 220; Harwood (1993), 203; Xie (1999), 124.

(Mussolini), there is no longer a common cultural inheritance on which to base an epic – unless as the willed labor of a single individual hero-poet who could embody it all within polymorphous literary personae, perhaps just such a man as one who had at age twenty-eight “resolved [...] at thirty [to] know more about poetry than any man living.”⁴⁹

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From Ithaca to Magna Graecia, Icaria and Hyperborea – Some Aspects of the Classical Tradition in the Serbian Avant-Garde

Bojan Jović

In a 1937 lecture entitled “Ikarov let. Sudbina današnje književnosti” [The Flight of Icarus. The Fate of Contemporary Literature], Stanislav Vinaver (1891–1955), the author of the first avant-garde programmatic text in Serbian literature, “Manifest ekspresionističke škole” [Manifesto of the Expressionist School] (1920), and a participant in the most important Yugoslav avant-garde activities in the third decade of the twentieth century, briefly explains the need to end his speech with mythological imagery:

Neka mi je dozvoljeno da ovaj pregled koji je samo pregled letimičan i ovlašán završim mitološkom slikom koja će bolje da izrazi ono što mislim, kao što uvek mit pomaže pravo misli.¹

[May I be permitted to finish this overview, which is only a cursory and brief overview, with a mythological image that will express what I think in a better way, as myth always helps with true thoughts.]

Vinaver reaches for the repertoire of Greek mythology so that he could describe the position of modern poetry by using the universally known story of Daedalus and Icarus. Stressing the dangerous situation of the poet in modern times, flying between the sun of metaphysics and the water of social conformism, Vinaver expresses his concern that, if not careful, contemporary poetry is doomed to perish without a trace:

Ako sadašnja poezija, sadašnja književnost ne bude umela da se sačuva, njena će voštana krila da se istope i od nje neće ostati traga stvarnoga. Možda će samo ostati trag kao ime jednog mora koje ih je progutalo. More u koje je potonuo Ikar nazvalo se po njemu.

¹ Vinaver (1937), 19. All translations are my own.

Naravno i to je lepo: lepo je dati svoje ime jednome moru, jednoj plavoj uzburkanjoj bezdani. Ipak je i u tome najgorem slučaju sudbina pesnika – pesnička.

[If the present poesy, the current literature does not find out how to preserve itself, its wings of wax will melt without leaving any real trace. Perhaps the name of the sea that swallowed them will remain as the only trace. The sea into which Icarus sank was named after him.²

Of course, that is also beautiful: it is beautiful to have your name given to a sea, to a blue roiling depth. Even in this worst case, the fate of a poet remains – poetic.]

Reflecting his personal interest in the Classical tradition, which was sporadic rather than systematic, Vinaver's mythological metaphor shows some clearly distinguishable characteristics: taking over Classical plot(s) and characters with an overall positive attitude and presence of a minute ironical stance; the practice of naming texts with regard to Classical references, and a conscious tendency to present general truths by confirming/enhancing them through the introduction of mythological images.³

By 1937, the radical poetic tendencies in Serbian literature of the Interwar period were slowly disappearing, blending with socially engaged literature; Vinaver's reaching into ancient myth and Classical antiquity can also be regarded as a retrospective summary of the collective attitude of the first Expressionist wave of the Serbian avant-garde. Though one can argue that treatment of the Greco-Roman tradition was neither universal nor intensive in the Serbian avant-garde as a whole,⁴ a number of Classical elements – both Greek and Roman, from art and literature – are indisputably present in its

2 Vinaver (1937), 20.

3 Vinaver employed a similar model of Classical reception as early as his 1922 essay "Bergson's Aesthetics," in which he writes that "Bergson's thought might get a more distinctive image if we borrow, as Plato always used to do, a myth to illuminate this thought. It is the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens." In Vinaver's interpretation, Odysseus represents the artist cunningly fulfilling his wish to hear the sweet and dangerous song of Sirens, the melody "of the true reality," but ultimately being unable to transfer it to others, to "ordinary people. Vinaver (1922), 948–9.

4 The avant-garde in Serbia comprised various groups of writers who have argued, often more in theory than in practice, for a variety of modern trends: Expressionists, Futurists, and Dadaists were themselves trying to launch new, local isms, such as Sumatraism, Hypnism, and Zenitism. The synthetic designation "post-war Modernism," used by interwar critics, is today dismissed as imprecise, and replaced by "Expressionism" as a common name for all

works. These elements are crucially positioned in the writings of prominent avant-garde authors such as Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977), Rastko Petrović (1898–1949) and Todor Manojlović (1883–1868) and sporadically extant in a number of texts of important writers such as Vinaver and Ivo Andrić (1892–1975) and more marginal ones such as Mony de Bouilly (1904–1968) and Rade Drainac (1899–1943). Moreover, two of the most important books announcing new tendencies in Serbian Interwar Literature, Andrić's *Ex Ponto* (1918) and Miloš Crnjanski's *Lirika Itake* [*Lyrics of Ithaca*] (1919) indicate the importance of Classical reception as an organizing feature of their work. The Classical tradition was a notable organizing principle of the Serbian cultural space in general during the modern period, forming in particular an important constituent of the Expressionist orientation in Serbian avant-garde poetics.

The reasons for this phenomenon stem from the unique combination of historical, political, cultural and literary factors brought about by World War I. Before the War, there were no avant-garde movements in Serbian cultural space. As a geographical and cultural periphery, the Serbian scene certainly could not have been, like Paris, London or the other great cosmopolitan European capitals that developed avant-garde movements, a center of intense concentration of artists from different countries. Rather, realism was the prevailing conception in literature and art. The emergence of Parnasso-Symbolism under the name of "Moderna" brought some traits of modernist literature to Serbia, but there was certainly no indication of a developing avant-garde. The outbreak and the consequences of the War brought a radical change, creating conditions for the foundation of a new, enlarged multi-national and multi-confessional country – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), as well as for the emergence of the avant-garde.⁵

Though Serbia found initial military success during its campaigns in 1914, by the end of the following year, a coordinated Austro-Hungarian and German attack followed by an epidemic of typhus, made the prospect of capitulation both inevitable and imminent. Rather than surrender, Serbian authorities opted for evacuation: The King and the Court, the government, the army and a large portion of the population (around 400,000 refugees) began withdrawing

these currents. The sole exception is Surrealism, which appeared as an organized movement at the beginning of the 30s. Deretić (1990), 267.

5 As in other European cultural milieus, the Great War exerted an important influence on literature and art in Serbia; on the negative side, it interrupted the rhythm of literary development, reduced domestic publishing to a minimum and led to the deaths of several prominent writers; it did, however, introduce to Serbian literature new subject matter, forms and aesthetic principles.

southwards during the winter of 1915/1916. The initial plan of retreat via Macedonia had to be changed due to the Bulgarian invasion, and instead took place over the Albanian mountains. Around 240,000 people died under these most difficult conditions. At the end, roughly 151,000 Serbian soldiers, as well as the MP's of the National Assembly and civilians, were transported from Durres to Corfu by Allied ships.⁶

For over two years, from 1916–1918, the Greek island of Corfu represented the center of the Serbian state-in-exile. During this involuntary stay, Serbian authorities made attempts to renew cultural life, among other things by continuing to publish the periodical *Srpske novine* [*The Serbian Newspaper*] (1916–1918) and establishing its literary supplement *Krfski zabavnik* [*The Corfu Entertaining Paper*] (1917–1918). Aimed at the revival of literary and intellectual activity as well as programmatically developing patriotic feelings and boosting the morale of the military and general population, *Krfski zabavnik* (hereafter *Zabavnik*) inadvertently laid the foundations for the creation of the postwar Serbian avant-garde, which, because it was published in Greece, featured a more prominent role for the Serbs' Greco-Roman heritage. In *Zabavnik*, Classical antiquity was present in different ways and in diverse forms: the most frequently encountered general references are to the Homeric epic, though other mythological characters such as Hercules, Prometheus, Sisyphus, Orpheus, Apollo, fauns, nymphs and other creatures are recurring figures. Perhaps not surprising given both their location and the circumstances of their arrival, Odysseus and his wanderings became a general paradigm for the fate of the Serbian army and people.⁷

In this light, in the introductory text of the first issue of *Zabavnik*, entitled "Jedna tužna godišnjica" [A Sad Anniversary], the editor Branko Lazarević (1883–1963) establishes a programmatic analogy between the fortune of the expelled Serbian people and Odysseus' stay in Corfu:

Sedmog aprila Srpske novine navršavaju svoju izgnaničku godinu na Krfu. Na svojoj bolnoj i teškoj odisejadi koja traje osamdeset i četiri godine, one, na Ulisovom ostrvu, čitavu jednu godinu, zajedno sa Srpskim Narodom, žive svoj crni izgnanički život. Jedna godina preteške tuge i bola! [...] ⁸

6 Bataković (2004), 73.

7 On the other side of the front, the English poets participating in the Gallipoli Campaign 1915–1916, stuck in a bloody military standstill near Ilion, were particularly susceptible to the experiences of the *Iliad*, re-living the Homeric chronotope at the very source of its creation, and consequently imbuing their versified wartime experiences and impressions with the motifs and procedures from Homer other epic. Vandiver (2010), 245–58.

8 Lazarević (1917a), 15.

[On April 7th, *The Serbian Newspaper* will have spent one year of exile in Corfu. On its painful and difficult Odysseyad (sic) that has lasted for eighty-four years, this paper, at Ulysses' island, has been living together with the Serbian people its dark exile life for an entire year. One year of utmost heavy-heartedness and pain [...]

The dramatic fight of the Serbian people fought during World War I in alliance with other Slav and Latin nations should also, according to Lazarević, acquire its artistic expression in "a new *Iliad* and *Aeneid* [...]"⁹ The editor of *Zabavnik* repeated this idea in his review of *Pesme bola i ponosa* [*Poems of pain and pride*] (1917), a collection of poetry by Milutin Bojić (1892–1917).¹⁰ Specifically, he saw Bojić's poetic collection as just one of the fragments of the envisaged Serbian *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, its new epic.¹¹

The main inspiration in the poetry of *Zabavnik*, as well as in critical essays and contributions, was the hero of the *Odyssey*, whose his troubled return to his homeland became a subject ultimately closer to the hearts of the Serbian poets than the mighty battles of the *Iliad*.¹² As one of the crucial places in the trajectory of Odysseus's return, Corfu was invoked and revived in the verses of Serbian poets, some of which find refuge precisely on this island. Stevan Bešević (1868–1942) dedicates a sonnet entitled "Romanca" [Romance] to Odysseus, depicting the Greek hero and his ship in resemblance to Serbian medieval knights in the tradition of patriotic poems published in the years of the Balkan wars 1912–1913:

Kljun mu broda sav u zlatu blista
Tanka vesla sitan biser kiti
Katarka mu sva od srebra čista
A jedrila u vezenoj sviti [...]
Zlatan šlem je pokrio mu čelo;
Zlatan pancir na široke grudi.¹³

9 Lazarević (1917a), 15.

10 Bojić died of tuberculosis in a Thessaloniki hospital in 1917. On the anniversary of his death, a Serbian translation of an obituary "Jedan srpski pesnik: Milutin Bojić" [A Serbian poet: Milutin Bojić] by the French writer Jean Dornis, filled with Classical motifs, was published in *Zabavnik*: "Thus, constantly holding the lyre of Orpheus, Bojić is dying in holy Hellas, on the shores of the mermaid sea. The Spring Wind brings him a light scent of flowering vines and oleander, mixed with the bitter taste of the residual mountain snow." Dornis (2005), 371.

11 Lazarević (1917b), 75.

12 Dimitrijević (2013), 167.

13 Bešević (2005), 176.

[The stem of his ship shines all in gold
 Small pearls adorn thin paddles
 The mast is of pure silver
 And the sails are of embroidered silk [...]
 A golden helmet covers his forehead
 A golden mail his broad chest.]

The final sinking of Odysseus' ship is followed by the song of an invisible choir and sad psalms lamenting the actual position of Serbian exiles who lost their fatherland and freedom.¹⁴

While by no means modernist nor avant-garde publications, *Srpske novine* and *Zabavnik* nevertheless attracted many young and upcoming writers during their Corfu period, both those in Greek exile and those scattered all over Europe. This generation of writers started to collaborate with the Serbian Corfu periodicals throughout 1917–1918 and would later go on to prominence in the avant-garde. Through their studies in Europe, members of the young generation encountered emerging European artistic and poetic movements, tendencies and authors. Cemented on the pages of *Zabavnik*, the bond between creative minds of different age and origin was strengthened in the cafés of Paris.¹⁵ Thus, a network of Serbian and Yugoslav-oriented intellectuals, writers and artists was established abroad,¹⁶ a network which was to remain active

14 Bešević (2005), 176.

15 Besides the apparent presence of themes from classical antiquity in *Krfski zabavnik*, an additional incentive for the adoption of Classical themes could also be found in the general interest for the Homeric epics, and especially the Odyssey, in Western cultural centers important for the formation of the Serbian avant-garde. Thus, the French cultural scene of the time was abundant with works dealing with Homeric themes, as James Joyce noted in his letter from Paris to Stanislaus Joyce of 15 July 1920: "Odyssey very much in the air here. Anatole France is writing *Le Cyclope*, G. Fauré the musician an opera *Pénélope*. Giraudoux has written *Elpenor* (Paddy Dignam). Guillaume Apollinaire *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*." Joyce (1966), 10. Homeric themes were also widely being used in German literature, particularly in Expressionism as another significant source of avant-garde impulses for the Serbian writers who had lived in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Manojlović, Andrić, Crnjanski), see Ziolkowski (1962).

16 Among the most important ones were Stanislav Vinaver, Dimitrije Mitrović, Todor Manojlović, Miloš Crnjanski and Ivo Andrić. Vinaver moved to Paris as early as 1908, where he studied mathematics and physics, music and philosophy, encountered Bergson's doctrines and became interested in contemporary literature and art. A volunteer during the First World War, he was transferred to Corfu, where he edited *The Serbian newspaper*. On the eve of the October Revolution in 1917, Vinaver was sent to St. Petersburg as a

and effective even after the end of the war and these writers returned to their country in the decades to come.

The foundation of a new, multi-ethnic and multi-national community enabled Belgrade to become the most important Yugoslav center of literary life, gathering Serbian writers from exile, Serbian expatriate writers from the former Austro-Hungarian regions of Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In peacetime, these authors continued their joint activities in various forms, primarily congregating around various magazines and publishers. In the spring of 1919, "A Group of Artists," which comprised a significant number of the young collaborators of *Zabavnik*, was founded in Belgrade. Its members were poets, writers, painters, musicians, and translators, a group which included Sima Pandurović, Sibe Miličić, Todor Manojlović, Tin Ujević, Miloje Milojević, Stanislav Vinaver, Branko Popović, Rastko Petrović and, after their arrival in Belgrade, Miloš Crnjanski and Ivo Andrić. The activities of the "Group" did not last long, but the common historical destiny and spiritual kinship of its members resulted in a series of short-lived literary associations, events and

translator for the Serbian diplomatic mission, where he witnessed the Russian artistic and social upheaval.

After his editorial engagement in *Bosanska Vila*, Dimitrije Mitrinović went to Munich in 1913 to do a doctoral thesis on contemporary art by Heinrich Wölfflin. In Germany Mitrinović connected with a group of intellectuals including Erich Gutkind and Wassily Kandinsky and approached groups that brought together international intellectuals and artists such as Frederic van Eden, Martin Buber, Pablo Picasso, Romain Rolland, Upton Sinclair, etc. During his stay abroad Mitrinović participated in the organization of an exhibition of Ivan Meštrović's work on South Slavic themes 1915 in London and established contact with Croatian poet Tin Ujević at a time when the latter was wandering through Europe.

In 1913 Ujević went to Paris, becoming a part of a mostly Serbian refugee community with Milun Milunović, Sava Šumanović, Rastko Petrović, Dušan Matić, Slavko Vorkapić, Boško Tokin, Branko Dešković, Sava Popović, Ljubo Babić, Rade Drainac, Vinko Foretić, etc. This experience of living in a predominantly Central European cultural circle was shared with other Serbian writers such as Todor Manojlović, Miloš Crnjanski and Ivo Andrić. Manojlović, who had excellent insight into Italian Futurism and modern art and literature in general, went to Basel after stays in Germany (Munich) and Italy (Florence), where he got an art history degree in 1914. At the outbreak of the First World War, he found himself in Italy, from where he went to Corfu as a volunteer in 1916, cooperating with Srpske Novine and *Zabavnik*. After the liberation, Manojlović came to Belgrade, as did Miloš Crnjanski, via Vienna and Zagreb, as well as Ivo Andrić, a former student of philosophy in Zagreb, Vienna, Graz and Krakow.

important works, introducing, among other things, Expressionist tendencies¹⁷ and the Classical spirit into modernist and avant-garde aspirations.

Ivo Andrić's *Ex Ponto*, a book of lyrical fragments and prose poems, was the first modernist book to announce the important presence of the Classical Tradition in the renewed Serbian cultural space after the First World War. This complex mixture of an (ex-)detainee's diary, confessions and meditative segments was written during the poet's ordeal – numerous imprisonments in Bosnia, Slovenia and Croatia over the course of the war years.¹⁸ The title of Andrić's work alludes to Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*, the Latin poet's second collection of verses from exile in Tomis on the Black Sea coast, where he was exiled by the Emperor Octavian Augustus. Andrić draws from the same subject matter as his Latin intertext, including reflections on his suffering and desperate appeals to various people to speak on his behalf to members of the imperial family and secure his recall from exile.

Ovid's *Epistulae* was organized into four books of poems in which the poet appealed to his addressees for his return, narrating in the course of these appeals various topics as well as offering a representative description of life in exile. Andrić's *Ex Ponto*, by contrast, was introspective, an inner dialogue with the poet's soul rather than a realistic depiction of his actual confinement.¹⁹ Andrić recounts thoughts, visions and mental images during his detention in a seemingly direct and unrestrained stream of conscious. Identifying thus with Ovid's banishment to the shores of the Black Sea, Andrić in his turn offered no

17 The experiences of the war were seen as critical for the introduction of the themes and motifs related to military operations – fighting, suffering, exile, disease, death, disillusionment, as well as to the post-war reality – a sense of not belonging, melancholy and depression. Accordingly, it was possible to seamlessly introduce significant characteristics of the poetics of Expressionism related to the War into Serbian literature in the years to come. These thematic, political and ideological changes were followed by the transgressions of genre boundaries and the introduction of free verse in poetry and lyricism in prose, and the emergence of short lyrical novel, predominantly war related. Jović (1994), 113–27.

18 In his high school days in Sarajevo, from 1903–1912, Andrić was close to the progressive nationalists and an ardent supporter of unification of the South Slavs in the state of Yugoslavia. After entering the Royal University in Zagreb in 1912, he continued his studies in Vienna and then in Krakow. With the outbreak of the First World War he returned to Serbia; immediately after arriving in Split in mid-July, the Austrian police arrested him and took him first to Šibenik and then to Maribor prison in which he was kept, as a political prisoner, until March 1915. During his imprisonment in Maribor, Andrić intensively wrote poems in prose (the future *Ex Ponto*). Released from prison, he was under house arrest in Ovčarevo and Zenica, where he remained until the summer of 1917. In November of the same year Andrić came to Zagreb where he was discharged from the Army; he lived and worked there until October 1919, when he moved permanently to Belgrade.

19 Bartulović (1920), 14.

political or historical explanation for his situation; instead, he attempted to give a broader, existential meaning to his writing by reflecting on the unsustainability of an extremely individualistic position:

Dani mi prolaze uzalud. Najljepši izvori dušini presahnuše. Izgubio sam dodir sa svima koji me vole i razumiju, taj spasonosni dodir koji nas krije i drži, koji djelima našim daje poticaj i snagu i življenja našem smisao.

Posve sam odcijepljen. Tonem u zaboravu. Prikriva me žalost. Sam sebi dolazim kao svijeća koju su zaboravili ugasiti pa izgara svu noć na oltaru kao neviđena žrtva u gluho doba.

Najteže je čovjeku kad sam nad sobom osjeti samilost.²⁰

[My days go in vain. The most beautiful wells of my soul have gone dry. I've lost touch with all those who love me and understand me, that salvaging touch that sustains us and keeps us, that gives impetus and force to our actions and meaning to our life.

I am completely torn. I am sinking into oblivion. I am covered with grief. I am like a candle they had forgotten to extinguish so it burns all night on the altar as an unseen sacrifice in the dead of night.

The hardest part is when one feels sorry for oneself.]

Ultimately contemplating the exilic condition of humanity, Andrić articulated the feeling of homelessness that would become of the utmost importance for the Serbian avant-garde:

Imao sam težak osjećaj: ja ne spadam ovamo i nemam ništa zajedničko s ovim ljudima. Neki djetinjski osjećaj užasnog straha i izgubljenosti kakav sam osjetio jednom na hodniku neke tamnice u noći. [...] Sličan osjećaj kao kad čovjeka zatvore u uzak prostor i kad vidi da mu ponestaje zraka i da će se ugušiti.

Ovo je od svega najteže: kad se osjeti, da se je zašlo daleko, da se je na mjestu na koje se ne spada, da su dani koji prolaze zaludni, da izgubljeno vrijeme plaće. Ja taj osjećaj kazujem prosto i možda nejasno, ali on mora da je dobro poznat ljudima koji nisu našli svog mjesta ili su ga izgubili.²¹

[I had an unpleasant feeling: I do not belong here and have nothing in common with these people. Some childish feeling of terrible fear and

20 Andrić (1920), 57.

21 Andrić (1920), 83.

bewilderment that I once felt in the hallway of a dungeon in the night. [...] A similar feeling to the one of a man imprisoned in some narrow space, realizing that he is running out of air and that he will suffocate.

This is the most difficult of all: when one feels that one has gone too far, to a place where one does not belong, that the days that pass are futile, that the lost time is lamentable. I speak of this feeling in a simple and maybe unclear way, but it must be well known to those people who have not found their place or they lost it.]

Andrić explicitly omitted his broader aesthetic or ideological intentions through a poetics of lyricism and introspection.²² In sharp contrast, Miloš Crnjanski's *Lirika Itake* introduced a genuine avant-garde strategy intended to expose the high-sounding and tearfully lofty rhetoric characteristic of pre-war Serbian poetics. This also served to deride common themes of romantic love and patriotism.²³

References to Classical antiquity in Crnjanski's work are present not only in the title of the collection but also in the very structure of the book.²⁴ The body of poems is enclosed by "Prolog" [Prologue] and "Epilog" [Epilogue], two lyrical texts in which the poet explicitly establishes a connection between the reminiscences of Odysseus returning from the Trojan War and the credo of avant-garde goals and practices.²⁵

22 On the level of intrinsic poetics, Andrić's *Ex Ponto*, however, represented an illustrative and important example of the blending of subjective lyricism and the short prose form typical of Serbian Expressionism.

23 At the beginning of World War I, Crnjanski, a Serbian student in Vienna, was persecuted as part of the retribution of Austria to Princip's assassination in Sarajevo. He was drafted and sent to the Galician border to fight the Russian Army, where he was wounded in 1915. After recovering in a Vienna war hospital, he was sent to the Italian front.

24 "Ditiramb" [Dithyramb]; "Oda vešalima" [Ode to gallows]; "Himna" [Hymn], "Elegija" [Elegy]; "Partenon" [Parthenon].

25 For the full text and translation of these poems, see the Appendix. "Epilog" was published separately, in the *Dan (Day)* magazine in 1919, under the same title as the latter collection, *Lirika Itake*; in the book, however, Crnjanski renamed it and placed it at the end. A second separate poem, published in *Savremenik (Contemporary)* but omitted from the collection, entitled "Pobedi" [To Victory] (1918), represents a critical and moralizing examination of the triumphal processions in celebration of victory over the enemy. Interweaving a number of time planes, Crnjanski directly tied the protests after WWI with from ancient Greek and Roman history. Crnjanski's lyrical subject is transferred into the past as a result of spontaneous evocation of Xenophon's *Anabasis* through the citation of the famous Greek cry: "Thalatta, Thalatta!" Crnjanski stresses the destructive and immoral side of war and the victorious malevolent public collective gloating ("I saw your chariots of bloody gold, pelted with flowers and naked women". Crnjanski (1918), 132. Criticizing the Roman

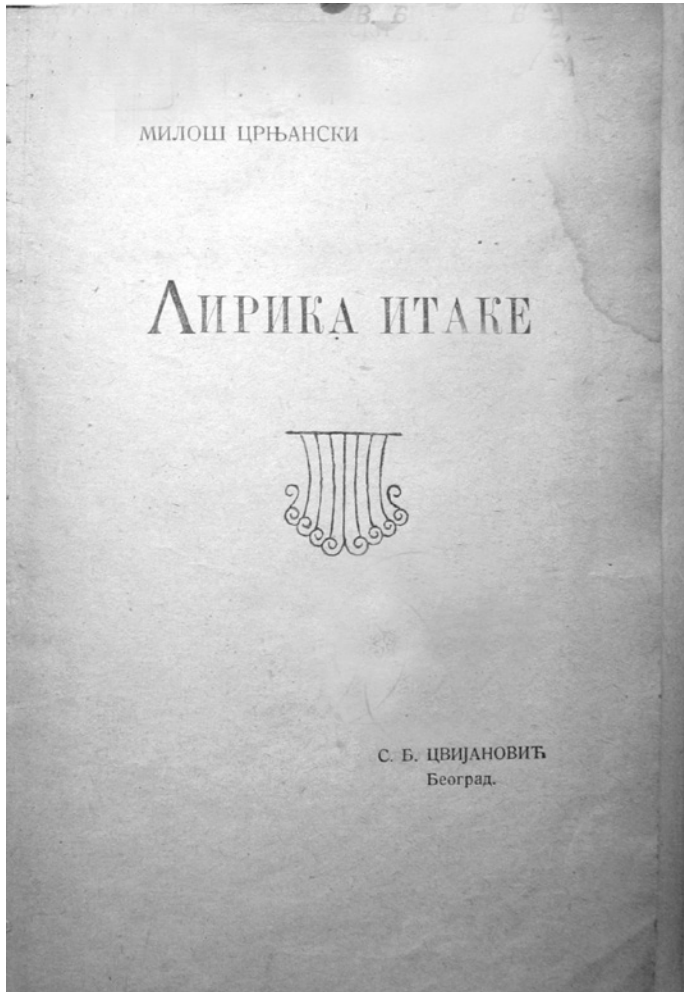


FIGURE 4.1 *Crnjanski's Lirika Itake*

The Classical heritage, emphasizing the human condition after the experience of war, is used here as a means of de-privileging and de(con)structing the authoritative voice of the surviving pre-war aesthetic and its ideological values. In this light, opposed to the Classical Odysseus, who returns home an essentially unchanged man, eliminates usurpers and establishes the traditional state of things, the avant-garde hero comes back to his Ithaca disillusioned and

triumph and contrasting it with the iconic representatives of Christianity (an ashamed Madonna with her Son), Crnjanski ends his poem with the remark that among all the spoils of war honor is never to be found.

disappointed, feeling that the world has hopelessly lost its balance and wholeness. Accordingly, his mood is rather ironic and his main emotional state is one of sadness, not only as an individual psychological condition but also as an ontologically and axiologically founded position ("sadness absolves of all"). Mockingly noting that his wish to kill on Ithaca²⁶ is prevented by positive legal constraints (and implicitly, and more importantly, by the experience of the enormous amount of meaningless deaths in war), Odysseus/the avant-garde poet transfers his intentions to poetic and ideological discourse.

Starting from these premises, Crnjanski then problematizes the tradition on several levels. In a number of cases, he uses designations of lyric genres stemming from antiquity to create tension between the genealogical expectations and the actual content of poems; in this way he negates the traditional treatment of themes related to national history.²⁷ Instead of the ethics of heroism defined by the compliant readiness to go to war and eagerness to die for the ideals represented in the gallant, almost kitsch figures of honorable combatants such as the aristocrat or the knight in armor, Crnjanski introduces the widest democratic/anti-elitist perspective, thereby denigrating the abstract,

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- 26 With the title of his collection its content, Crnjanski, who had studied German Expressionist poetry, establishes an intertextual connection with Gottfried Benn's short play *Ithaca* [Ithaka] (1914). In Benn's play, rebellious students actually murder their professor, the representative of science, logic and reason, in a Dionysian fervor: "Go deeper into things if you want to teach us! We are the young generation. Our blood cries out for the heavens and the earth and not for cells and invertebrates. Yes we're trampling the North underfoot. The hills of the South are swelling up already. Oh soul, open wide your wings; soul! soul! We must have Dream. We must have Ecstasy. Our soul is Dionysos and Ithaca!" In his text Benn uses "Ithaka" in a rather broad sense, as a metaphor for home, for the primordial cradle of mankind and its vital, ecstatic powers, situated in the warm seas of the Mediterranean. Benn (1997), 20–1.
- 27 "Himna" – "Nemamo ničeg. | Ni Boga ni gospodara. | Naš Bog je krv." ["Hymn" – "We have nothing. | Neither God nor Master. | Our God is blood."] Crnjanski (1919), 6. "Zdravica" – "Da živi groblje! | Jedino lepo, čisto i verno. | Da živi kamen i ruševine! | Prokleta što cveta u visine. || Mi smo za smrt!" ["A Toast" – "Long live the cemetery! | The only nice, clean and faithful thing. | Long live rocks and ruins! | Damn whatever blooms into the heights. || We opt for death!"] Crnjanski (1919), 8. "Oda vešalima" – "Ta vi ste svakom narodu doneli | ponos, i spas, i radost. | Ta k vama su išli koji su hteli | čast na svetlu, i mladost. | Pa što bi došla tako tajno | i pognula svoju glavu? | Hoćemo da vas dočekamo sjajno | sa pesmom u vašu slavu." ["Ode to Gallows" – "Why, you have brought pride to every nation, and peace, and joy. To you went those who wanted the honor of the world, and youth. | So why would you come so secretly and bow your head? | We want to welcome you splendidly with a poem to your glory."] Crnjanski (1919) 6. "Naša elegija" – "Nama je dobro. | Prokleta pobeda i oduševljenje. | Da živi mržnja smrti i prezrenje." ["Our Elegy" – "We are well. | Damn victory and enthusiasm | Long live hate death contempt."] Crnjanski (1919), 11.

idealistic and unrealistic paradigm of war. The Serbian official Vidovdan (Vid's-Day) ethics and ideology are thus seen through the eyes of nihilists and anarchists, deniers and rebels, or simply from the perspective of the common people – peasants, workers or beggars. At the same time, Crnjanski presents erotic bodily motifs in his love poems, mixing the “high culture” of exalted feelings with more profane carnal impulses.

To an extent, his procedure coincides with the practice of literary carnivalization based on the tradition of the Menippean/serio-comical literature through the introduction of grotesque realism and degradation/lowering to the material level of all that is abstract, spiritual, noble, and ideal. In this way, Crnjanski creates an opposition between the falsely exalted (medieval aristocratic/bourgeois) and the low (grotesque body), the sanctified and the profane; his inversion of these usual binaries thus challenges the traditional rhetorical strategies which were used to arouse nationalist and ideological sympathies. The element of humor is also present in Crnjanski's approach: his lyric voice is not joyful but rather bitter and dark, resting in the domain of irony, sarcasm, or black humor.

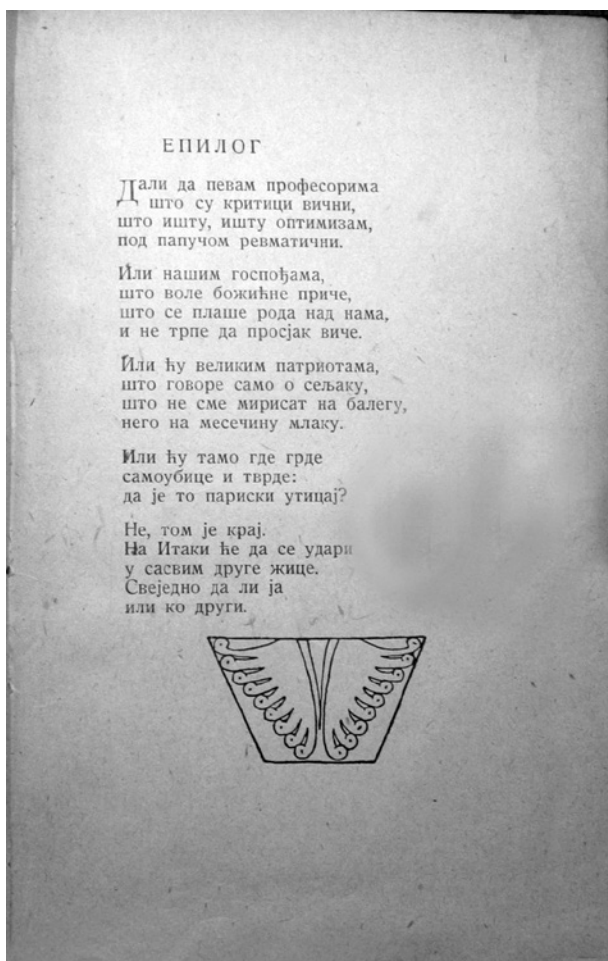
Forty years later, Crnjanski republished his initial poetry as the 1959 book *Itaka i komentari* [*Ithaca and Commentaries*]. In this collection, he tried to present the circumstances of the creation of his early works in a complex and comprehensive manner, through verses accompanied by autobiographical commentary and explication. Looking back at programmatic poem of *Lyrics of Ithaca*, the “Prologue,” he explicitly reflects on the presence of antique motifs:

Trojanske i mikenske aluzije u tim stihovima bile su hotimične. Pesnik smatra, i danas, Odiseju za najveću poemu čovečanstva, a POVRATAK IZ RATA za najtužniji doživljaj čoveka. Iako njegove pesme daleko zaostaju za tim monumentalnim tvorevinama u stihovima, TAJ OSEĆAJ je bio njihova glavna sadržina.²⁸

[The Trojan and Mycenaean allusions in these verses were deliberate. The poet considers, even today, the Odyssey to be the greatest poem of humanity, and THE RETURN FROM THE WAR the saddest experience of man. Although his poems are far behind these monumental creations in verse, THAT FEELING was their main content.]

Even in his later work, *Među Hiperborejcima* [*Among the Hyperboreans*] – partly written on the eve of the Second World War but published in 1966 – a complex and extensive mixture of novel, essay, autobiography and lyrical prose, Crnjanski uses Greek mythological intertexts to advance the theme of utopian

²⁸ Crnjanski (1959), 9–10.

FIGURE 4.2 *Crnjanski, "Epilogue"*

longing for a far away mythical realm and his belief in the fundamental interdependence of things in the world. Moving on from his previous fascination with Sumatra (Sumatraism),²⁹ Crnjanski's thoughts were directed to the far North (or wherever Hyperborea is to be found), in contrast with sun-bathed Italy, where, on the eve of the Second World War, he awaited the further development of historical events. In accordance with his basic poetic and philosophical beliefs, Crnjanski discusses art, nature, politics, figures of importance

29 Present in his poem "Sumatra" and the corresponding programmatic text "Objašnjenje Sumatre." ("Explanation of Sumatra"). Crnjanski (1922).

in public life, history and art, matters of life and death. He gives an account of the destinies of his friends and contemporaries, pointing out the existence of the dense network of underlying connections between everything there is in the world: from Ancient Greece and Rome through the Slavic countries to the far Hyperborean North.

Poručnik me onda pita, podrugljivo, da li se Vergilije, zna, i u mojoj zemlji? Velim: kao u Italiji, u školi – van škole, slabo, kao i u Italiji. Tako mi se bar čini.

Rimski pesnici, latinski klasici, svakako su nam, Slovenima, tuđi? Zašto bi nam bili tuđi? Ljudi su svud ljudi. Eto, ja, koji živim u Rimu, ja nisam mislima, ovde, nego čak na dalekom Severu. Još dalje, negde, u polarnim krajevima. U Hiperboreji.³⁰

[The lieutenant then asks me, mockingly, whether Virgil, is also, known, in my country? I say, as in Italy, at school – out of school, little, as well as in Italy. So at least I think.

The Roman poets, the Latin classics, must certainly seem foreign, to us, the Slavs?

Why would they seem foreign to us? People are people everywhere. Behold, I, who live in Rome, in my mind, I am not here, but as far as the Far North. Still further, somewhere in the Polar Regions. In Hyperborea. [...]

Everything in the world is connected. The Roman poets, and Slavs as well. The Hyperboreans.]

Unlike Crnjanski, the Serbian poet and writer Todor Manojlović was not aiming at directly subverting the ideological or aesthetic order of Serbian culture and literature. Instead, he shaped a specific parallel lyrical universe, trying to accomplish a synthesis of contemporary spirit and ancient heritage by modernizing the symbols and incentives from ancient Hellenic and Roman culture and giving them a new poetic function. In his two collections of poetry, *Ritmovi* [*Rhythms*] (1922) and *Vatrometi i Bajka o Akteonu* [*Fireworks and A Fairy Tale About Actaeon*] (1928), rich with Classical themes and motifs, Manojlović exploited the achievements of French Symbolist and German Expressionist poetics in the spirit of Stéphane Mallarmé, Ernst Stadler, Georg Trakl and Else Lasker-Schüler. *Ritmovi*, which is characterized by verses dedicated to the light, the sun and Mediterranean myths, transposed the Orphic cult of poetry

30 Crnjanski (1966a), 161–2.

and Dionysian joy into hymnic language and a poetic mythological fable. Manojlović combined the ascendance of the lyrical subject to cosmic heights and Apollonian ecstasy of the light with the introduction of a utopian model of a peculiar chimeric Arcadia, in the shape of distant lands of Icaria:

Sa one strane mora,
Daleko, daleko – gde galeb
I galija ne stižu više,
Cveta jedno rumeno kopno:
Bleštava Ikarija,
Drevni i prisni zavičaj
Mirisnih, krilatih snova
I iščezavajućih
Oplakanih proleća.³¹

[On the other side of the sea,
Far, far away – where gulls
And galleys do not arrive anymore,
Flourishes a blushing land:
Dazzling Icaria,
The ancient and intimate homeland
Of fragrant, winged dreams
And vanishing
Lamented springs.]

Along these lines, Manojlović displayed two of the important features of cosmic orientation in Serbian Expressionism: creating a colorful poetic fairy tale as well as presenting it in a shape of mythical utopia.³² Icaria, in this case, carries multiple meanings: besides being the place where Icarus had met his end it was also one of the birthplaces of Dionysus,³³ and a favorite residence of the goddess Artemis, who was also an important figure for Manojlović.

31 Manojlović (1922), 43.

32 Vučković (1984), 124.

33 On several occasions Manojlović builds his poems upon the motifs of Dionysus, as in the poem "Ditiramb" [Dythiramb]: "U znaku Dionisa" [In the sign of Dionysus]), in one instance merging this myth with another one of his favorites – the myth of Narcissus. In the poem "Preobraženja" [Transformations] indicating Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Manojlović thematizes the mythical episode of Narcissus and Echo, "the talkative nymph." Manojlović (1922), 34–6. The lyrical subject of the poem, Narcissus finally overcomes his paralyzing



FIGURE 4.3 *Manojlović, Vatrometi i Bajka o Akteonu*

self-love stemming from the beauty of his own reflection and finds a new will to live and sing, symbolically transforming himself into a satyr-like kind of wild piper.

Indeed, Manojlović named his second book after the myth of Artemis and Actaeon, the young hunter unfortunate enough to stumble upon the naked goddess bathing in a spring. Transformed into a deer for his offense and robbed of his ability to speak, Actaeon was finally hunted down and killed by his own hounds. In Manojlović's eponymous final poem of the collection, the lyrical "I" identifies itself with a tragic mythological character: Actaeon died hoping to become a symbol of awakening and the transformation of the dark forest into a sunny quiet grove, and a predecessor of young and merry hunters to come. However, the authorial comment in the closing verses denies such a hope, giving a picture of an eternal return of the same misfortune: hunter-poet Actaeon lives on with his wounds and visions, in a haunted forest, while

za lovca nema mira, nema smrti
I hajci nikad neće biti kraja.³⁴

[for the hunter there is no peace, there is no death
and the chase will never be over.]

Perhaps the most elaborate case of the treatment of Classical heritage in the Serbian avant-garde is present in the works of Rastko Petrović, an interwar author of the utmost importance. Petrović's literary works were an amalgamation of extremely modern poetic procedures and mythopoetization/carnivalization. By modeling his literary works according to a mythopoetic logic, Petrović actualized numerous symbols, figures and procedures specific to the primitive experience of reality – sequences related to the topography of the mythical cosmos, vegetative and agricultural symbolism, anthropocosmization, personification and metamorphosis (metempsychosis), as well as the grotesque concept of the body and various forms of laughter and the comic.

Poetic orientation towards primitive modes of thought and artistic creation was particularly expressed by the use of literary forms belonging to the tradition of the carnivalesque genres of the serio-comic. These forms, primarily Menippean satire, offered great diversity and complexity as well as openness to a variety of philosophical issues, thus enabling Petrović to find a literary paradigm for his avant-garde strategies.

Petrović's first short novel, *Burleska Gospodina Peruna Boga Groma* [*The Burlesque of Lord Perun the God of Thunder*] (1921), characterized by an avant-garde playful use of Slavic mythology, shows deep genealogical ties with Classical antiquity. *Burleska* displays characteristics typical of the

34 Manojlović (1928), 56.

spoudogeloion: the fusion of past and present perspectives, an unencumbered attitude to tradition and a diverse combination of prose and verses styles and (narrative) voices. Petrović's text is thus marked by a diversity of genres and provocative stances, containing (often in a mocking way) references to cosmogonic and theogonic texts, heroic epic, travelogues, parables, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, apocalypse, soliloquies, dialogues, modern war prose, national historiography, etc.

While Petrović's first collection of poems, *Otkrovenje* [*Revelation*] (1922) is more semantically directed to problematizing Judeo-Christian symbolism and

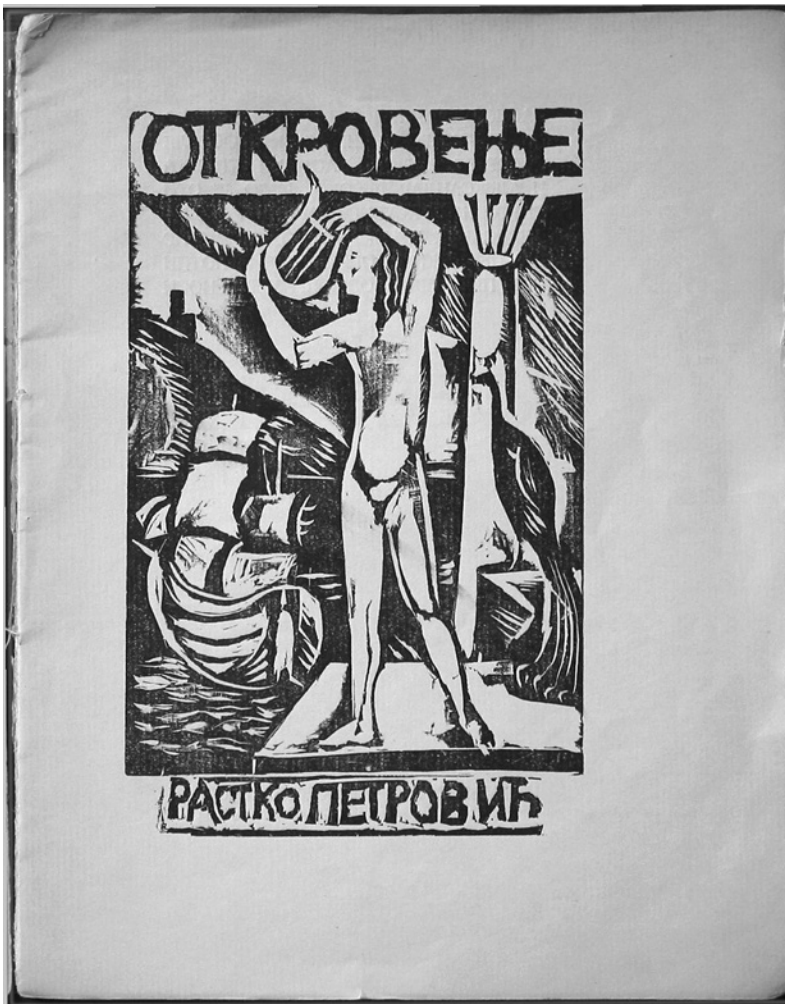


FIGURE 4.4 Rasko Petrović, *Otkrovenje*

Slavic tradition than Classical antiquity, sporadic allusions to ancient Greek and Roman heritage can nonetheless be perceived in this book as well as in several other poems published in periodicals. Not unexpectedly, these issues are explored primarily through the character of Odysseus. One of the most developed and most successful examples of this usage is present in the opening verses of his 1921 poem “Juče i danas” [Yesterday and Today]:

Sirene se zakikotale piskavo izvan nas, Sirene.
 Ali ne sirene grčkih arhipelaga
 Na koje su kapali pali Odisejevi poljupci
 Kao večernja kiša izmešana sa sokom od pomorandži.
 Sva je mitologija umrla bila zauvek.
 Tako otpočeo novi neki razdruzgani život:
 Na automobilma crvenim koji su jurili kroz noć
 I između kuća
 Vojnika četiri držala se uspravno,
 Ra zatrubiše uvertiru smrti, razoravanja i pobede,
 Za njima zapucaše topovi.³⁵

[Sirens giggled shrilly outside of us, Sirens.
 But not the sirens of Greek archipelagos
 Onto which dripped and fell Odysseus' kisses
 Like evening rain mixed with the juice of oranges.
 All the mythology had died forever.
 Thus began a new crumpled life:
 On the red cars rushing through the night
 And between the houses
 Four soldiers held it upright,
 And they trumpeted an overture of death, destruction and victory
 After them the guns opened fire.]

Here Petrović exploits the double meaning of the word “Siren” in order to establish a complex poetic reality composed of overlapping layers of ancient and modern time, associating vocal characteristics and the name of mythological creatures from Odyssey with the contemporary reality of war, embodied in the sounding of the air-raid alarm.

Petrović's late works show a significant shift from Slavic to Greco-Roman heritage, and more direct usage of elements of the Classical tradition. In a chapter

35 Petrović (1921a), 52.

of his extensive multipart essay “Pozorište, pozorište!” [Theatre, Theatre!] (1929), entitled “Antičko pozorište u Ostiji” [Ancient theatre in Ostia], Petrović combines situational comedy and irony with a Classical setting, both of a material and of non-material nature.³⁶ He uses a variety of rhetorical tropes from the serio-comic genres to describe the irony of a second-rate performance of the Aeschylus tragedy *Seven Against Thebes* held in first-class surroundings in the ancient Roman theater in Ostia. Instead of the solemn and dignified atmosphere one expects from Greek tragedy, the narrator presents the play through a series of unexpected (comical) events that completely undermine even the slightest hope that the play itself and its theatrical setting will assume a more appropriate tone. Furthermore, due to a narrative emphasis on the body parts of these inadequate actors, elements of the grotesque are also present.

Petrović’s preoccupation with the Classical tradition is further confirmed in his posthumously published works. The novel *Dan šesti* [*The Sixth Day*] (1966), which deals with the Serbian retreat through the Albanian mountains during World War I and the aftermath of survivors in exile in America, includes a variety of Classical reminiscences, motifs and themes.³⁷

Facing the ultimate primordial power – both creative and destructive – of the stoicheia for the duration of the eight weeks of the 1915 withdrawal, Petrović’s weary heroes dwell upon the elements.³⁸ In doing so, they succumb to a nightmarish state of mind which is depicted through a complex network of associations drawn from Classical mythology. Thus, demonic creatures from Greek mythology are often present, predominantly in the thoughts of the protagonist Stevan Papa-Katić. As a rule, they are related to female characters: one of the women resembles a mythical Gorgon;³⁹ the other reminds him of a Fury.⁴⁰ In another vision, the hero’s dead mother apparently wanders in the dark, bringing to his mind the mythical Greek queen Cassiopeia, turned into a constellation or Odysseus’s mother Anticlea in the underworld.⁴¹ In yet another association related to female characters, an analogy with the Amazons is drawn, built on the heroine’s readiness to fight fiercely for her honor

36 Petrović (1921a) 52.

37 Pokrajac, (2014/5), 384.

38 Petrović (1982), 55–60.

39 Petrović (1982), 54.

40 Petrović (1982), 316.

41 Petrović (1982), 367. Stevan’s grandfather also appears to him in a monstrous form of mythological origin, like “a polyp with a thousand tentacles, and like a hydra with a thousand heads.” Petrović (1982), 460.

and survival.⁴² An American woman resembles Ceres, the Roman goddess of abundance, due to her Aegean origin and her lush and gorgeous appearance.⁴³

Although less frequent, supporting characters have analogous mythological associations too; for instance, a female character makes implicit analogies with Jocasta when contemplating herself, feeling like a mythical mother of her lover and a lover of her son,⁴⁴ while another one experiences a vision of a pastoral landscape containing Phoebus Apollo, the deity of spiritual light and heavenly purity.⁴⁵

Some references to Classical antiquity in the visual arts are also present in *Dan šesti*. In a complex allusion based on multiple meanings of a word and the quality of the sound of a human voice, Stevan reminds himself of (the sculpture of) Dionysus in the context of the archaeological discoveries made in 1914 that he had learned about in the newspaper:

Čuo je njegov glas, brižan, izmučen i ipak bronzan. Iz mora, iz ambisa i vekova, izvukli su bronzani kip Dionizosa, dečaka, umoran, prastari, »bronzan«. [...] Mislio je na to kako ga je glas Smedega Petra setio na bronzani kip izvađen u Pozilipu. Novine su prošle godine pisale o ribarima koji su naišli na bronzu, a on se toga više nikada nije setio.⁴⁶

[He heard his voice, caring, tortured yet still bronzed. From the sea, from the abyss and centuries, they pulled out the bronze statue of Dionysus, a boy, tired, ancient, "bronze". [...] He thought about the voice of Brown Peter reminding him of the bronze statue recovered in Posilippo. Last year, the newspapers wrote about the fishermen who had come across the bronze, and he never thought of it since.]

Additionally, a micro-reference to the tale from the mythical cycle of Cadmus, the Abduction of Europa, popular in the history of European Art, can be found in a description of a US household that emphasizes Classical motifs inlaid in decorative furniture.⁴⁷

42 Petrović (1982), 229.

43 Petrović (1982), 485.

44 Petrović (1982), 37.

45 Petrović (1982), 486.

46 Petrović (1982), 208–9.

47 Petrović (1982), 501. Finally, another memory of an artifact drawn from Classical material, this time a paper one, displays an extreme example of the mixture of high and low, corporeal / sexual and spiritual / cultural. Recalling his childhood in Belgrade, Stevan

The travelogue *Sicilija* [*Sicily*] (1988), posthumously compiled from Petrović's unpublished manuscripts, represents perhaps the most successful blend of fictional framework, travel writing, lyrical prose and mythopoetic creation based on the Classical tradition. The writer tours around Sicily, describing the most important points of his itinerary (Palermo – Monreale – Agrigento – Syracuse – Etna – Taormina), shifting off and on through a time and space of fantasies, memories, myth, literature and “real” events:

Teško da smo razlikovali šta je pripovetka a šta je stvarnost. / [...] / jer se sve to izmešalo u meni, pa je sad ovo ne više jedan moj doživljaj na moru, već istorija, čija senka sa bregova, kad veče počne da pada, dolazi čak do ovog zaklona gde je jedrilica. To je istorija, sveg paganstva i Jelade.

Sicilija mi je dala sve ono što sam očekivao putujući u pravu Grčku. Našao sam jednu razbijenu barku Odisejevu koju kupaju talasi najdivnijega mora, pevajući elegiju. Iza barke uz ljubičasti breg penje se stado jaganjaca. Prva je elegija ispevana na Siciliji. Elegija je bila svakako jedinstvena, ali zemlja na kojoj je rođena mora da je uzvisi.

It was difficult to distinguish between the story and reality / [...] /⁴⁸ since it is all mixed up in me, and now this is no longer one of my experiences at sea, but history, its shadow coming from the hills when night begins to fall, right to the shelter where our boat is. This is the history of the entire pagan world and of Hellas.⁴⁹

Sicily gave me all what I had expected while traveling to the true Greece. I found a broken Odysseus' boat bathed by the most wonderful sea waves, singing an elegy. Behind the boat, a flock of lambs climbs along the purple hill. The first elegy was sung in Sicily. That elegy was certainly unique, but the country where it was born must have made it sublime.⁵⁰

In this light, Classical reminiscences are present from the very beginning of Sicily – suffering from an acute exacerbation of his pulmonary disease, the narrator identifies himself with the mythical centaurs:

Papa-Katić remembers a copy of the *Iliad*, used by him and his friends in the caves of Tašmajdan Park for the very specific purpose of collectively “pressing jets of sudden and first excitement” – i.e. masturbating – into its pages. Petrović (1982), 122.

48 Petrović (1988), 13.

49 Petrović (1988), 67.

50 Petrović (1988), 248.

Kao kentaur koga pogodi strela međ rebra, ja sam se odbacio maločas i pao po tlu, gledajući samo krv koja lopti iz mene. Kentaur! Da, da, kao kentaur sam se zaletio, i pao, pogođen. Tako sam ga uvek zamišljao, poluživotinju i polučoveka; kad god bih ga se setio i sinoć kad ga je neko spomenuo. Sasvim je uzaludno učiti detalje u mitologiji ili istoriji. Za svaku stvar mi imamo odmah, sasvim nesvesno, jednu predstavu koju onda više ničim ne popravljamo niti menjamo. Za mene je kentaur oduvek jedna čovečanska beštija koja juri i koja pogođena strelom pada. Nasred poljane; krv mu lopti iz usta.⁵¹

[Like a centaur that was hit by an arrow in the ribs, I was thrown back a moment ago and fell on the ground, seeing only the blood pouring out of me. A centaur! Yes, yes, as if a centaur had appeared, and fell down. I always imagined him like that, half-animal and half-man; whenever I thought of him and last night when he had been mentioned. It is quite in vain to learn the details of mythology or history. For each thing, immediately and quite unconsciously, we form a belief that we never improve or change afterwards. For me, a centaur is always a manlike beast that hunts and, struck by an arrow, falls down. In the middle of the field; his blood pours from his mouth.]

Just as Miloš Crnjanski had developed an elaborate mythology of overlapping antiquity and modernity in Rome, so Petrović develops the motif of an ideal place in his encounter with southern Italy: contemporary Sicily is seen primarily through its historical and mythological connotations, originating from Magna Graecia and serving as a model for a real world Arcadia. Sicilian travelogue is therefore an opportunity for the storyteller to revive and relive the pastoral vision of the world in the very place from which it sprung. The landscape around the ruins of the ancient city of Taormina is seen as the genuine location of the development of bucolic poetry and as a model for creating a locus amoenus, rich with vegetative pictures and pastoral symbolism:

Između svakog tog zelenila provlače se stada u pratnji pastira koji sviraju u dvojnice. Kraj svih staza, naslonjeni na stabla što bacaju senke, sviraju u duple svirale najlepší čobani koje je ikada tle Itake radalo. Ponekad promine pastir sa diplama koje otegnuto ječe. I nigde drveta ne mogu biti toliko gusta da nebo plavo i prozirno ne protiče između njih da natopi zemlju i stenu. Sve su staze pune bršljana i lovora, i sve su uvijene u nebo.

51 Petrović (1988), 13–4.

Sasvim nagi dečaci jure moru, ovo je puno crvenih koralaa kao teških trešnjevih grana.

To je Grčka, pastoralna, vesela i laka, onakva kakva je svakako bila ipak i do poslednjeg časa.⁵²

[Between each patch of green, herds are pressing, accompanied by shepherds that play the double flute. Alongside all trails, leaning against the trees that cast shadows, the most handsome herdsmen ever born on Ithaca's soil are playing their drone flutes. Sometimes a shepherd passes by with an aulos and its drawn-out moan. Yet nowhere can trees grow so thick that the sky, blue and transparent, wouldn't pass between them and saturate the earth and rock. All tracks are full of ivy and laurel, and all curling into the sky. Completely naked boys are rushing to the sea, full of red corals like heavy cherry branches.

This is Greece, pastoral, cheerful and light, as it was definitely until the very last moment.]

The intertwining of different fields – in both senses of the word – of reality, fiction and myth is noticeable in another chapter of Petrović's Sicilian writing, starting from a peculiar identification of characters and landscape and the appearance of pagan deities:

Njina koža je bila šibana vetrovima i pocrnela suncem. Sve od čega su njina mlada tela bila sastavljena izgledalo je da je od iste divne građe od koje su bili načinjeni i ovi srušeni stubovi sicilijanskih hramova. Provođeci sa svakim od njih, ispružen na suncu, zatvorenih očiju, razmišljao sam da smo / [...] / tog veličanstvenog kamenja, sazreli kao voće, zlatno i crveno, dostojni tog tamnozelenog rastinja i tog intenzivnog plavila vode i vazduha. Stado sivih jaganjaca je tiho i smireno pod maslinama dok pastir svira u svoju starinsku flulu.

Kad bi naše prijateljice došle u svojim lakim belim haljinama, njina lica su bila potpuno prelivena suncem. Nije bilo senki na njima i one za mene nisu bile ništa drugo do antička božanstva u svojoj večnoj mladosti.⁵³

[Their skin was beaten by the winds and tanned by the sun. It seemed their young bodies were composed only of the same wonderful material as these demolished columns of Sicilian temples. Spending time with

52 Petrović (1988), 76.

53 Petrović (1988), 100.

each of them, sprawled in the sun, my eyes closed, I thought that we / [...] / were worthy of those magnificent stones, we ripened as fruit, gold and red, we were worthy of the dark green foliage and the intense blueness of the water and air. A herd of gray lambs is quiet and calm under olives while a shepherd is playing his ancient flute.

When our female friends arrived, dressed in their light white robes, their faces were completely sunbathed. There were no shadows on them, and to me they were nothing else than ancient deities in their eternal youth.]

The present time of narration, saturated with mythological associations, is then combined with the tale of an ancient Syracusan mariner, Arkhipos, a participant and victim in the battle between the Athenian and Syracusan navies during the Peloponnesian war. This introduction of an additional story layer creates a complex amalgamated mythopoetic reality into which Petrović finally inserts etiological myths about the origin of the sea and dolphins, enclosed in the story of the battle. In another posthumously published text, *Sabinjanke* (*The Sabine Women*, 1974), his only dramatic work, Petrović explicitly indicates the background of the violent relationship between male and female characters frequently found in his writings. In this play, the basic history of the Sabine women (told in the history of Rome by Titus Livius, treated in Ovid's *Fasti*, often present in Classical painting, and frequently used as a plot in the history of European theater), receives the most complete form of all its previous occurrences, very close to the ancient model.

Just as the most important writers of Serbian Expressionism used Classical antiquity as a frequent reference point for their own literary works, so too did less prominent ones, albeit on a much smaller scale. One example is Solomon Mony de Bouilly's "Doktor Hipnison, ili Tehnika Življenja" ("Doctor Hypnison, or the Technique of Living", 1923),⁵⁴ the first "film on paper" (that is, a "script" for a film never meant to be shot) in Serbian literature. De Bouilly's scenario can be described as an example of the European avant-garde "film writing" tendencies: a cinematographic-like blending of different arts, genres, prose and verse styles, graphic elements and text, fantastic fiction and folklore in a carnivalized sequence of events, with a giant hero, Hypnison, re-arranging and devouring the elements of the film universe, comprised of a movie theatre, film projection and the content of a motion picture.

54 In Hypnos, the short-lived avant-garde revue of Rade Drainac, meant to be the organ of his programmatic "Hypnism". All of these designations originated from Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep.

In the following years, during which his work was marked by the poetics of Surrealism,⁵⁵ de Bouilly wrote another experimental avant-garde text based on Ixion. In this opaque work ("Iksion," 1926), the relationship with its Greek mythological source remains highly dubious, even if the main elements of the myth can be detected: lust, betrayal, murder, ascension to heaven in a contraption of a special design. In general, de Bouilly's poem is a love story, if not of an autobiographical than certainly of an auto-referential nature; after the initial murder of a countess, apparently during a sex game, the principal character, now identified with the author himself, climbs the walls of the National theatre in Belgrade to join a beautiful lady walking on the roof. Finally, they fly off together in a special carriage drawn by eagles. This contraption incorporates the joining of high and low – basic animal needs such as hunger and a sex drive are used to produce enough power for the lovers' flight to heaven.

To conclude: the authors belonging to the first wave of the Serbian avant-garde were affected by the First World War in different ways. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some were held under house arrest or in prison (Andrić), while others took part in actual combat in foreign uniforms (Crnjanski). On the other side of the front, some were volunteers or conscripts in the Serbian army, actively engaged in the fighting and suffering of temporary defeat (Vinaver). A third group, who remained as civilians in Serbia, experienced the Golgotha of the collective withdrawal through Albania (Petrović, Drainac) and exile on the island of Corfu (Manojlović). Different destinies, however, led most of the important representatives of the new literary poetics to similar results: the decisive identification with ancient themes, motifs, heroes, and the use, even if in some cases quite sporadic, limited or opaque, of Classical associations, in order to describe the current existential situation and modern literary aspirations.⁵⁶

55 After meeting Breton in Paris, in 1925, De Bouilly began his collaboration with the French Surrealists, publishing the first Serbian automatic text and a pictorial novel, *Vampyre*, in the 1925 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*.

56 It should be noted that the poetry collections of Andrić, Crnjanski, Manojlović, Drainac and Petrović are also accompanied by appropriate illustrations, partly originating in the Classical tradition. The lyre as a symbol of poetry appears both on the covers of Crnjanski's and Petrović's book, in the first place as a vignette (the same one appears at the end of the Belgrade edition of *Ex Ponto*), in the second as an attribute in the depiction of the poet. In Manojlović's case, the whole of the cover page of his second collection of poems contains a reproduction of the antique relief from the metope representing Artemis and Actaeon devoured by dogs, 470–460 BCE, from Temple E (Temple of Hera) in Selinunte, Sicily, Italy. On Drainac's Aphrodite's garden cover there is a small vignette of a Sphinx.

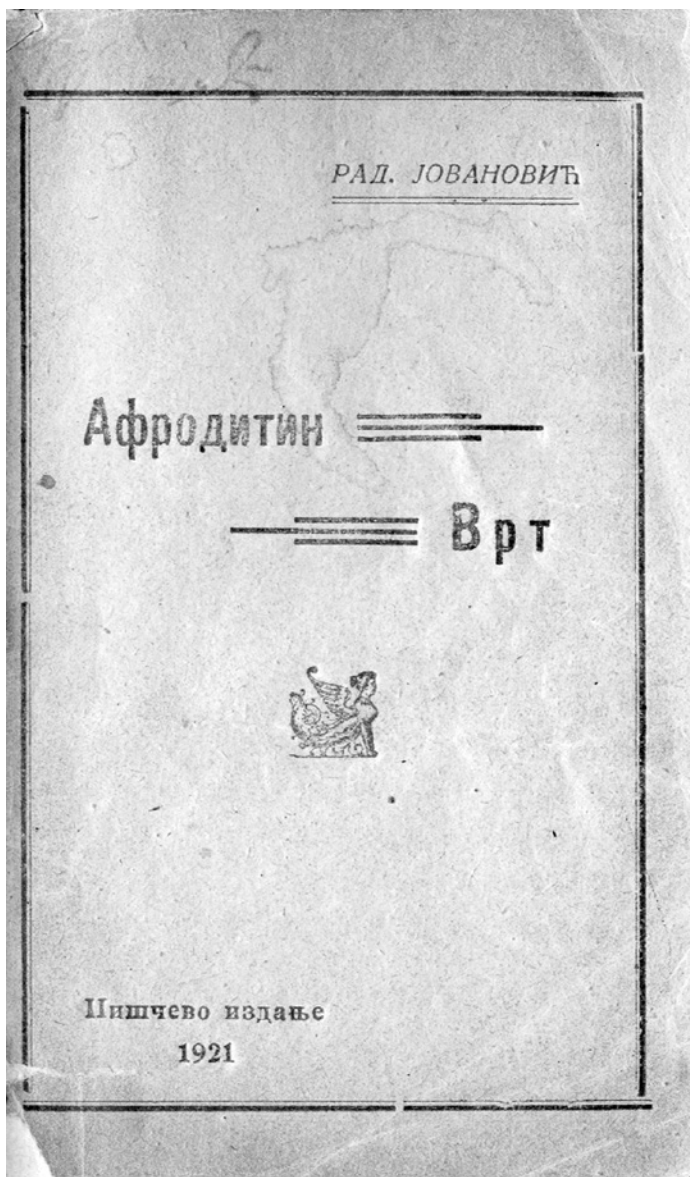


FIGURE 4.5 *Drainac, Afroditin vrt*

In Serbian interwar literature, Classical antiquity was not an object of obligatory criticism, a relic to be confronted, refuted or modernized (as was the case in Italian Futurism), nor an integral part of discussing the parallels

between national and Hellenic, Apollonian and Dionysian, as in German Expressionism.⁵⁷ For Serbian Expressionists, the Classical heritage was rather a point of reference that in their eyes provided a common, indisputably understandable background for the true foundations of European civilization they felt they were part of – both by the specific conditions of their education, experience and avant-garde literary aspirations as well as by their broad sense of engagement with the human condition. Additionally, it served as the source of the generic and stylistic forms and the rhetorical strategies by which they challenged and undermined the poetic, aesthetic and ideological assumptions of the old, pre-war order, the “reversal of values” exemplified through carnivalization and the appropriation of serio-comic genres. Finally, the Classical tradition formed the basis for modeling many different instances of complex literary amalgamations of ancient and modern poetics, including utopian visions of Icaria, Hyperborea and Magna Graecia.

In the course of time, fate would bring the majority of writers of the first generation of the Serbian avant-garde back to the position of travelers-exiles and homeless wanderers, prevented by circumstances to return to their home(land). Some of them entered the diplomatic service (Crnjanski, Petrović, Andrić), and others, ideologically compromised before and during the Second World War, went into exile and were removed from official literary histories. Rastko Petrović died in the United States in 1949; Crnjanski returned to Belgrade from London only in his later years, in 1965.

In this way, completing the symbolic circle, the “foreigners” in the domestic cultural space once again shared the fate of homeless Odysseus – living away from their homeland or in internal exile; what they left behind were decades of lively artistic and intellectual activity, and many a classic work of Serbian and Yugoslav literature marked by the essential presence of the Classical tradition.

57 “I felt the ridiculous inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. A raging need to liberate words, dragging them out from the prison of the Latin period.” Marinetti (2009), 119. “We shall show Carducci as he is wandering amidst the warring Achaïans, nimbly skipping out of the path of galloping horses, and then paying his respects to Homer; then we see him going out with Ajax for a drink at the local bar, called The Red Scamander, and at the third glass of wine his heart, whose palpitations will be visible on screen, pops out of his jacket like a huge red balloon and is seen flying above the Gulf of Rapallo.” Marinetti et al. (2009), 232.

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Appendix

"Prolog" Crnjanski (1919), 15.

Ja videh Troju, i videh sve.
More, i obale gde lotos zre,
i vratih se, bled, i sam.
Na Itaki i ja bih da ubijam,
al kad se ne sme,
bar da zapevam
malo nove pesme.

U kući mi je pijanka, i blud,
a tužan je život na svetu, svud –
izuzev optimiste!
Ja nisam pevač prodanih prava,
ni laskalo otmenih krava.
Ja pevam tužnima:
da tuga od svega oslobodjava.

Nisam patriotska tribina.
Nit marim za slavu Poetika.
Neću da preskočim Krležu, ni Ćurčina,
niti da budem narodna dika,
Sudbina mi je stara,
a stihovi malo novi.

Ali: ili nam život nešto novo nosi,
a duša nam znači jedan stepen više,
nebu, što visoko, zvezdano miriše,
il nek i nas, i pesme, i Itaku, i sve,
djavo nosi.

"Prologue"

I saw Troy, and I saw it all.
The sea, and the coast where the lotus ripens,
and I came back, pale, and alone.
At Ithaca, I too would like to kill,
but since it's not allowed,
at least I will sing
a little bit of new songs.

In my home there is a drinking spree, and
fornication,
sad is the life in the world, everywhere –
except for optimists!
I'm not a singer of national rights,
nor do I flatter noble cows.
I sing to the sad ones:
that sadness absolves of all.

I'm not a patriotic tribune.
Nor do I care for the fame of Poetics.
I do not want to skip Krleža or Ćurčin,
nor to be a national pride.
My Fate is old,
and my verses hardly new.

But: either life brings something new to us,
And our soul means to us one degree higher,
closer to the sky, high, starry, and scented,
or let both us, and poems, and Ithaca, and all,
go to hell.

“Epilog” Crnjanski (1919), 75.

a li da pevam profesorima
što su kritici vični,
što ištu, ištu optimizam,
pod papučom, revmatični?

Ili našim gospođama,
što vole božićne priče,
što se plaše roda nad nama,
i ne trpe da prosjak viče.

Ili ću velikim patriotama,
što govore samo o seljaku,
što ne sme mirisat na balegu,
nego na mesečinu mlaku?
Ili ću tamo, gde grde
samoubice, i tvrde:
da je to pariski uticaj?

Ne, tom je kraj!
Na Itaki će da se udari
u sasvim druge žice.
Svejedno da li ja
ili ko drugi.

“Epilogue”

Should I sing for professors
that are accustomed to criticism,
that demand, demand optimism,
rheumatoid, under their wife's thumb?

Or to our ladies,
that love the Christmas stories,
that fear the storks over us,
and cannot stand a beggar shouting.

Or should I sing for the great patriots,
that speak only of the peasant,
that ought not to smell like dung,
but like lukewarm moonlight?
Or I'll go where they condemn
suicides and claim:
that it is a Parisian influence?

No, this is the end!
At Ithaca completely
different strings
will be strummed.

Gods, Heroes, and Myths: The Use of Classical Imagery in Spanish Avant-Garde Prose

Juan Herrero-Senés

The importance of Greco-Roman myths to modernist literature is well known, and in this respect, Spanish production is no exception. Successive generations of writers – from the older generation of 1898 to the young avant-garde writers, the focus of this paper – made extensive use of the materials provided by antiquity.¹ This was fostered decisively by an educational system that contained a strong component of classics. Not only were Latin and ancient history and culture studied, but the study of Spanish literature, especially that of the Golden Age, involved regular contact with a rich classical tradition. All of this left writers with an extensive repertoire of themes, motifs, characters and symbols at their disposal. Making use of this symbolic capital involved the clear awareness of a common heritage, a sense of belonging to a civilization with deep roots and the recognition (sometimes explicit) of the present feasibility of a legacy of the past and its aesthetic possibilities. In that sense, the classical element was not a mere addition of something strange, it was part of a deeply-established entity in the cultural imaginary of the time.

The beginnings of the Spanish avant-garde can be placed in the years immediately following the end of the First World War. A group of young writers attentive to developments abroad, especially Futurism, Dadaism and Expressionism, decided to lead a cultural renewal. They gathered themselves around little magazines, promoted artistic gatherings and began to pen manifestos and critical texts, praising new aesthetic guidelines while rejecting the values of the past. In the mid-20s, this renewal made possible the most ambitious undertakings in the fields of fiction, novel, and poetry. The “Generation of 1927” (Federico García Lorca, Jorge Guillén, Rafael Alberti, to name the most

¹ The stage productions of Miguel de Unamuno or the use of the *Iliad* in the novel *La aldea perdida* [*The Remote Village*] by Armando Palacio Valdés serve as examples. (All translations from the Spanish are my own.)

See the works gathered in *Heroes, Myths and Monsters in Contemporary Spanish Literature*, and *Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel*, reviewing the presence of mythological components in production since the late nineteenth century to the present.

well-known figures) advocated formal difficulty and aesthetic purity, leaving aside sociopolitical concerns with an elitist gesture. Thus, they implicitly accepted the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera which, focused primarily on issues of economic interventionism and curbing the intense revolts of the lower classes, cared little about intellectuals. The Spanish avant-garde was dedicated almost exclusively to artistic endeavors, seeking the modernization and internationalization of Spanish culture until 1929, at which point the dictatorship began to accumulate excessive failures, the global economy collapsed and the weakness of liberalism, under the pressure of fast-growing fascist and communist discourses, became undeniable.

There is no contradiction between the young Spanish avant-garde writers unapologetically using the classical tradition while proclaiming their hatred of the past. Firstly, because the past that the Spanish avant-garde wanted to leave behind was the immediate one, that is, the perceived nineteenth-century bourgeois mediocrity that dominated Europe until the First World War. Secondly, because the Spanish vanguard tended towards a synthesis between radicalism and respect for tradition; that is, they promoted merging, dialogue and entanglement over confrontation. And thirdly, because Spanish artists were fully aware of the creative possibilities that existed in intertextuality and other mechanisms of rewriting: allusion, pastiche, irony, parody and so on. In this sense, the modern Spanish writer did not feel the obligation of the writer of the Golden Age to use classical tradition but he took it as another source of inspiration.²

The proliferation of myth has yet another source directly related to the interwar cultural atmosphere, that strange mixture of feelings such as confusion, joy, disappointment, freedom and emptiness. It was the nihilistic perception that the worldview of reality – one that for centuries had provided stable ethical and metaphysical foundations – had disintegrated, and individuals lived like misfits with no new standards, not knowing what to believe in. That feeling of chaos and transience – not necessarily negative – led art to

2 Among the most iconoclastic writers, there were also those who advocated against the uses of antiquity. In his article "Al margen de la moderna estética" ["Outside the Modern Aesthetic"] (1920), a young Jorge Luis Borges called for pure creation without relying on earlier traditions, and he especially demanded ignoring the rhetoric, mythology, and symbolism of all previous poetry. The most important critic of the Spanish avant-garde, Guillermo de Torre, stated in his article "Bengalas" ["Flares"] (1924) that it was "unnecessary to fly up to the mythological attic", although three years later he would adopt a less radical position and would welcome artists that deal with topics of the past ("the eternal themes"), as long as they approached them from an avant-garde perspective ("del tema [...] 13).

seek ways to provide meaning to the present. This was, as is well-known, the idea at the center of what Eliot called “the mythical method”: Using myth was “simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. [...] It is a step toward making the modern world possible for art.”³ Similarly, the young Spanish thinker Ángel Sánchez Rivero stated in his article “Sobre la cultura clásica” [“On Classical Culture”] that the classical heritage stood for a point of rest and security in a time of maximum instability.⁴ Rivero echoed the orthodox version of the meaning of ‘classic’, which included among its core values rationality, order, harmony, clarity and rigor, a vision which was certainly behind much of the revival of Greco-Roman classicism throughout the West over the first half of the twentieth century. But the breadth and diversity of classical symbolic capital offered more values than just those alluded to by Sánchez Rivero. The novelties of the contemporary world, as well as the ethical and social changes that had arisen, made room for unusual aesthetic associations. That explains why we have numerous modernist reworkings of myths, each leading toward different definitions and conclusions.

As David Attenbery recently noted, Eliot’s famous text does not consider all the possibilities of myth because it is closely interpreted as a method.⁵ Specifically, Eliot does not touch on two important questions: first, that the rewriting of myth has a playful component and that modifying traditional components can be used to simultaneously engage and entertain the reader; second, and more importantly, the reference to classical tradition can provide proposals (or at least clues) that guide not only understanding but also judgment and behavior. The mythical method, Attenbery summarizes, “makes the modern world possible, not only for art but for meaning, morality, and vision.”⁶

In this regard, we must also keep in mind that in the atmosphere of dissolution that swept the Western world since the late nineteenth century, the very notion of objective truth was brought into question, giving way to skepticism and moral and epistemological relativism. Now, classical mythology holds the status of knowledge without appearing as truth. It is a fiction, a construction, but without a recognizable author and apparently with universal scope. It is something like the condensation of archetypes of humanity and a primal formulation of behaviors and opinions. Myth, in short, explains and exposes without a strong truth-claim. Or in the words of Michael Bell, myth provides “the

3 Eliot (1923), 167.

4 Sánchez Rivero (1934).

5 Attenbery (2014).

6 Attenbery (2014), 55.

basis of a compelling analogy for what it might mean to inhabit as conviction a world view which is also known to be ultimately relative”⁷ Furthermore, it does so through a dense network of stories. These stories, the novelist Benjamin Jarnés remarked with nostalgia in 1934, were not originally exclusive to high culture, but were part of the common stock of the general population, that is, they constituted the folklore of the Greek people (“Ejercicios”).

I argue that the presence of the classical in Spanish avant-garde literature goes beyond a catalog of references and is not just a purely intertextual and metaliterary game. To see how this unfolds we have to look at prose fiction. Although Ortega Garrido states that it is in poetry where “stronger links with the Greco-Roman classical heritage are established,”⁸ it is in prose where we find the best examples of, on the one hand, a deep engagement with diverse and complex classical allusions, and, on the other, strong attempts to use myths to reflect on contemporary issues.⁹

Grégory Coste has written about the coincidence between the renovation of fictional forms in Spain and the rewriting of myth. Both processes display “a willingness to give formal coherence to new spiritual experiences drawn from modernity”¹⁰ that neither traditional means of formal expression nor the stories of popular culture could assume satisfactorily. In this regard, Coste reaffirms Eliot’s decision to present the recourse to the classical tradition as a “method” to lend a principle of cohesion to new forms of storytelling. We could couple this with Ortega y Gasset’s idea that for new authors myth could function as a “poetic leaven” which serves both to highlight reality and defamiliarize the text, thereby overcoming the realistic way of narrating so popular in the nineteenth century. This supports the idea that the use of the classical archive in literature can have both a formal function (as a method for writing and a repository of themes and characters) and a discursive value, one that makes contemporary literature capable of revealing unexpected perspectives on reality. The avant-garde writer sees (as well as projects, imposes, and recreates) the myths hidden in reality and uncovers them. This is why the use of myth in

7 Bell (1997), 12.

8 Ortega Garrido (2012), 290–1.

9 Examples in theater include the plays *Narciso* [*Narcissus*] (1928) by Max Aub and *Orestes I* (1930) by Felipe Ximénez de Sandoval. Examples in prose fiction include numerous short stories and sketches published in literary magazines and novels such as *La Venus mecánica* [*Mechanical Venus*] (1929) by José Díaz Fernández, *La túnica de Neso* [*The Tunic of Nessus*] (1929) by Juan José Domenchina, *Los terribles amores de Agliberto y Celedonia* [*The Terrible Loves of Agliberto and Celedonia*] (1931) by Mauricio Bacarisse.

10 Coste (2012), 42.

narratives goes beyond “the appointment, reminiscence or occurrence based on the inherited mythological imagination.”¹¹

However, and this is what I argue here, there is yet another function of myths in the avant-garde novel which is more ambitious than those outlined by Eliot and Ortega. With the help of myth, Spanish novelists explained, interpreted and even sanctioned their social current state of affairs. In that sense, they reaffirm myth in its role as symbolic collective representation with the capacity to validate cultural beliefs and practices and to provide an idealized representation of social reality. By linking the capacities of myth with the fictional (i.e., not truth-claiming) status of fiction, Spanish avant-garde prose established a modernist mythopoeia that offers “a way of combining radical relativity with the apodictic nature of conviction.”¹²

In using myth to talk about the present, the modernist writer acknowledges that myths are not timeless. In the words of Michael Bell again, “[myths] reflect historical processes, and they change over time as the cultures that maintain them change.”¹³ Also, the avant-garde novelist does not undertake a simple movement of translating myth to a new text. There is a creative process of transformation, recreation and hybridization (for instance, with other mythical traditions) that tends to show these reborn myths as unsuccessful, changing and fickle. Generally, avant-garde characters are mythical figures who have been knocked off their celestial pedestals; these characters are often humanized, and they embody modern types who are degraded versions of gods and heroes. In this regard, Grégory Coste notes that the reworking of myth in the Spanish avant-garde novel usually goes by “a triple procedure: accumulation, degradation, and metamorphosis.”¹⁴ What is more, Rosa Fernández Urtasun has stressed the predominance of a humorous perspective, which shows the writer’s attempt to maintain a critical distance from an inherited past, the strong presence of an aesthetic consciousness, and the recognition of the impossibility of building a modernist epic with a degraded hero. Modernist heroes have the grandeur of failure.

In the following pages, I will analyze three uses of mythology: its use as an explanatory device of the times in *Moon of Cups* by Antonio Espina; the ideological use that seeks a beautification of a political position in *Hermes in the Streets* by Antonio de Obregón; and the prescriptive use of myth as an

11 Ortega Garrido (2012), 289.

12 Bell (1997), 4.

13 Bell (1997), 20.

14 Coste (2012), 45.

ethical warning in Benjamin Jarnés's *Tantalus*. My analyses are presented in chronological order.

Moon of Cups and the Jazz Age

The writer, critic and journalist Antonio Espina (1894–1972) produced several collections of poetry and two volumes of fiction in the heyday of the avant-garde in Spain. Both books were published in the selective “Nova Novorum” series sponsored by Ortega y Gasset to promote a renewal of fiction writing: the collection of stories *Pájaro Pinto* (1927) and *Luna de Copas* (1929). After 1929, Espina defended the necessity for the avant-garde movement to overcome its aestheticism and move to an engaged standpoint. Writers must be involved in politics and work towards implementing in the social arena the modernization achieved in art. In this vein, Espina abandoned fiction and supported a progressive liberalism that would end the dictatorship and make Spain a republic, something that as it is well known actually happened in 1931. Espina occupied several government positions until the outbreak of the civil war and went into exile to Mexico. He definitely returned to Spain in 1953, to work in journalism until his death in 1972.

Moon of Cups was one of the most radical avant-garde novels published in interwar Spain. Espina's prose disregards most of the established narrative conventions and uses novel techniques such as parataxis, fragmentation, cinematic descriptions, neologisms, metaphorical conjunction and so on. *Moon of Cups* tells of a summer love story between two rich youngsters with a disastrous end. While on vacation at the beach, Silvia, the only daughter of the wealthy merchant Contreras, feels fatally attracted to Aurelio Sheridan, a lonely and seductive millionaire. After spending a single night with him, Silvia becomes pregnant, triggering a family debacle. Back in Madrid, Silvia secludes herself, and her obsession with that summer meeting finally causes her to lose her mind. For his part, Aurelio Sheridan forgets Silvia completely, and in the following years he achieves absolute financial success, but the lack of vital stimuli drives him, in the end, to suicide.

My focus here will be how and why Espina saturates his narrative with classical components. First, the plot follows the Aristotelian principles for a tragedy in its development of a cause-and-effect chain:¹⁵ the story consists of two characters who, after an evil encounter, suffer a twist of fate (“reversal of intention” or *peripeteia* for Aristotle) which ultimately leads them first

15 I use S. H. Butcher's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, available online at classics.mit.edu.

to “recognition” (*anagnorisis*) and then to failure (“change of fortune” or *catastrophe*). The “tragic flaw” (*hamartia*) from which both characters suffer is “embriaguez” [drunkenness], that is, the momentary suspension of reason that leads to a loss of stability and control. The novel is divided into two parts: “Bacchae” and “Bacchus”. Each part focuses on one of the two lovers disguised as mythical figures: Silvia, a bacchante, and Aurelio Sheridan, the god Bacchus/Dionysus. Both characters personify gender stereotypes of the 20s, a time associated in Spain and in the West, with dissolution, youth, sports, nightlife, loose morals, frenzy and a new sense of freedom. Silvia and Aurelio are both young, rich, independent, passionate, arrogant and fearless.

During a vacation at the beach, Silvia becomes strongly attracted to the enigmatic Aurelio. At the outset, she rejects him because she wants no commitments that could weigh down her optimism and frivolity. But when Aurelio dares her to pay a nocturnal visit to his castle (on the nearby private island of Charybdis), she agrees. There she falls under the influence of a superior power that intoxicates her, cancels her willpower, and makes her feel “in the core of her body the echoing of an atavistic emotion.”¹⁶ She returns home at dawn, never to see Aurelio again. He has discarded her “like a wine glass, useless once it has been emptied.”¹⁷ After the meeting, Silvia undergoes a transformation: she becomes in the words of the novel, “a bacchante-like mystic woman, pure, in the eastern and pristine sense of the myth.”¹⁸

In Greco-Roman culture, the Bacchae women were worshipers of Bacchus, responsible for carrying out a series of secret ceremonies related to rites of fertility and regeneration that were mostly forbidden to men. These women climbed in procession to a lonely mountain and were inspired by Dionysus/Bacchus into a state of ecstatic frenzy through a combination of dancing, alcohol, and drug-induced intoxication. This rite contained archaic elements such as tearing up small live animals (a reference to Dionysus being devoured by the Titans), as well as much more erotic content, as the women spent whole nights dancing naked, and their ecstasy led them to tour the forests propositioning the men they encountered. The rituals were intended for women to achieve “enthusiasm”, which is, etymologically, the ‘entry by god’ (women thought they had made love to the god). Those who achieved enthusiasm were then initiated and considered lucky and protected. Espina brutally modified the latter part of the myth, as it is precisely the encounter with Aurelio that spells bitter

16 Espina (2001), 244.

17 Espina (2001), 259.

18 Espina (2001), 270.

misfortune for Silvia: now “consecrated”¹⁹ (i.e. pregnant) she returns to Madrid and, driven mad, locks herself in the family house which she will never leave. There she watches her father commit suicide and suffers a miscarriage.

From the very beginning of the novel, Aurelio Sheridan is associated specifically with Dionysus/Bacchus. He is equipped with a “Dionysian, agile and graceful” body and boasts two superhuman faculties: one, he is capable of eliminating rational control from himself at will; and two, he has a power called ‘transfer spring’ [*resorte traslaticio*], a defense mechanism which allows him to transform an unpleasant sensation located in a bodily organ into a comfortable one in another part of the body. For all this, he is also described as a “Superman”²⁰ and as someone able to become a “monster.”²¹ But it is his optimistic, defiant and powerful attitude which provides him with the charm of “he who came from antiquity”²² and with the capacity to subjugate women, who fall drunk before him. He belongs to a higher league of those with enough strength to make others lose their minds.²³ After the encounter with Silvia – whose charm was precisely her pride and rejection of Aurelio’s advances –, the male protagonist builds a financial empire, and soon reaches the peak of professional and personal success. It is then when Aurelio suddenly feels the need to escape from this world and decides to commit suicide by jumping from a plane.

Espina wants to show how in the interwar years certain irrational behavior proliferated, becoming fashionable and even a sign of social and economic status. The social pursuit of uncontrollable states has its paradigmatic example in alcoholism as a way to foster disinhibition and lack of control. The novel detects drunkenness as a core interwar aim: if Silvia becomes intoxicated with desire, Aurelio feels the drunkenness of an existence of continuous success and pleasures that leads to a feeling of an aimless wasted life. The author does not try to explain the origin of this appetite for drunkenness. He merely describes it as a “reenactment” of “the legendary force of pagan cults.”²⁴ Modern man par excellence is a strong being, capable of anything but being dissatisfied. He cannot find a justification for living, so he constantly searches for new experiences, and is dedicated to accumulating sensations. When calm suddenly sweeps over him, the man is empty and decides to end his life.

19 Espina (2001), 259.

20 Espina (2001), 263.

21 Espina (2001), 248.

22 Espina (2001), 247.

23 Espina (2001), 276.

24 Espina (2001), 244.

By using the mythological mold, Espina shows how antiquity can work as a mixed provision of references through which contemporary society is interpretable. The relationship between Bacchus and a Bacchae illuminates how certain behavior had become in the 20s not only licit but somehow sacred: a “drunk” living driven by lust, luxury, risk, debauchery, and unconsciousness. The many references to “cups” contribute to this idea: cups are alcoholic containers; in Spanish, to go “de copas” means to go out drinking; Aurelio/Bacchus worships a very special cup, the Holy Grail; and “copas” are one of the four suits of the Spanish playing cards, which reinforces the vision of life as a sort of a game of chance.

Hermes in the Streets: Personality and Politics

Hermes in the Streets was published in 1934. By then the tumultuous infighting of the 11 Spanish Republic had made the ironic, highly stylish, and depoliticized writing that characterized the avant-garde, completely unfashionable. Its author, Antonio de Obregón (1910–1985), was a literary and theater critic who had penned a book of poems (*El campo, la ciudad, el cielo* [*The Field, the City, the Sky*]) (1929) and another avant-garde novel, *Efectos navales* [Marine Supplies] (1931). By 1934, his initial leftism had transformed into an increased sympathy with fascism – at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, de Obregón stayed on Franco’s side and eventually became a filmmaker for the Francoist office of propaganda.

Hermes in the Streets goes beyond the recognition and/or criticism of certain current social patterns, and embarks into active promotion. As we will see, Obregón’s proximity to fascism produces an explicit praise of a certain behavior shaped by a fascination with power, strength, and heroism. Obregón wants to build a new kind of hero for the present, and ultimately place it as a model for imitation, and the way to do it is linking his protagonist to the mythological universe par excellence, the Greco-Roman. But this choice is also ideologically loaded, as it responds to a widespread dissatisfaction with traditional political and social roles among European young intellectuals in the 30s. The young Spanish writer José F. Pastor said in 1929: “We have not been given a set of values in which we could feel safe in joyful and free possession.”²⁵ Before this ethical vacuum, not a few writers would require the establishment of mighty moral prescriptions. And some claimed –namely those closest to reactionary

25 Pastor (1929), 1.

positions-, that it was -in Pastor's words- through "myth" that "a life of action" should be defined.

By the time *Hermes* appeared a significant number of writers had already embraced fascism. By 1929 some young intellectuals -championed by the avant-gardist Ernesto Giménez Caballero- had started to praise the effectiveness and solidity of Italian politics and to claim for Spain a similar movement towards authoritarianism. The frustration with the first years of the Spanish Republic – perceived as a government of mild liberals – together with the lack of confidence in democracy prompted these intellectuals to promote the creation of fascist political parties (first established around 1933). Simultaneously, these intellectuals were very aware of the importance of symbolism and paraphernalia in the political discourse and in several meetings they crafted the imaginary of Spanish fascism, adapting Italian and German models, which of course included all the nostalgic references to the Roman empire, militarism, and the cult to the hero. What Obregón's novel does is to appropriate most of this imaginary and apply it to a story of personal triumph.

Hermes in the Streets tells the story of a poor and uneducated young man who quickly advances in society to become the billionaire owner of a record company. Simultaneously he goes through several love affairs until he possesses Blanca, his infatuation from youth. We are presented essentially with the story of a self-made man who gets all he strives for. How? Hermes is concerned with maintaining an athletic and appealing physical presence and with being recognized for his elegance and individuality. He uses his rude manners as a mark of distinction and shows contempt for women. He believes in the existence of castes, rejects bourgeois life and social duties, defines reality as "ugly and shabby,"²⁶ humanity as "gray and imperfect"²⁷ and today's driving forces as "widespread ambitions, and the conquest of many powers."²⁸ Life is a competition where only personal benefit matters. All the winners of today (famous athletes, millionaires and dictators) resemble one another. Money can buy anything, empathy is a weakness, luxury, social prestige and an intense sexual life are the proof of success, Hermes is a "man of action. It flowed from him, like a waterfall, a blind desire for power and energy, for irresistible dynamics [...] he was increasingly acquiring the soul and courage of a leader."²⁹ Hermes has no qualms about deceiving, cheating or defrauding in order to climb the social ladder, and he undertakes a tireless quest to gain recognition.

26 Obregón (1934), 26.

27 Obregón (1934), 23.

28 Obregón (1934), 9.

29 Obregón (1934), 140.

This portrait recalls many of the traits associated with his Greek counterpart. Hermes was the messenger of the gods and able to foretell the future. He was also considered the god of commerce, flight, and sudden or unexpected enrichment. A patron of travelers, tradespeople and thieves, his chief characteristics were inventiveness, versatility, fascination, trickery, and cunning. For William Hansen, “Hermes is the most prodigious of Greek tricksters, practicing deceit almost from the moment of his birth”³⁰ and “as a latecomer among the gods, Hermes was eager to acquire domains for himself in order to secure a niche in the Olympian bureaucracy. Happily, he was a gifted thief and liar from the start and also a brilliant inventor, combining the roles of trickster and culture hero.”³¹ In classical Greece, he was depicted as young, athletic and nude, as he was also the god of athletic skill. His symbols were the caduceus, and the winged sandals and cap.³²

In Obregón's novel Hermes' behavior is based neither on convictions nor moral reasoning, neither on what he has learned from his past experience nor on the advice of others. The origin of his actions is obscure and irrational. Now, we already encountered characters driven by some force, instinct or power beyond reason when talking about *Moon of Cups*. The difference here is that, while Aurelio and Silvia fail, Hermes ends up a successful millionaire who also manages to gain love. Irrationality and primitivism led to suicide and a crooked life in the first novel. Here, they are the means for personal triumph.

Antonio de Obregón presents Hermes as the tutelary hero of his times. This was criticized by some when the novel appeared. For the novelist Benjamín Jarnés, Hermes embodied an attitude that actually belonged to the previous decade of the happy twenties: he took life to be a sport for which only victory was important and moral considerations irrelevant. What Hermes did was “slide happily through circumstances.”³³ For Jarnés, this was unacceptable in such dire times as the mid-30s, where there was a need for portraits of honest people with high moral standards and a deep understanding of reality. Therefore, instead of Hermes, Jarnés claimed that Prometheus should be considered the real hero of the present: he who longs for a “profound” life and is willing to earnestly “sink into the essence” of things.³⁴ On the other hand, the formula for success that Hermes followed, was easily applicable to the world

30 Hansen (2004), 196.

31 Obregón (1934), 197–8.

32 This description of Hermes' attributes is based in the accounts by Pierre Grimal, Harry Thurston Peck and William Hansen.

33 Jarnés (2001), 279.

34 Jarnés (2001), 279.

of politics. The multinational recording company where Hermes acts as CEO is “an autocratic state where Hermes rules out of his personal whim”;³⁵ sometimes later in the novel democracy is labeled “the great swindle.”³⁶ Hermes stood for despotism and solid leadership, a Caesar who powerfully imposes his ideas on people and is not deterred by moral prejudices or sentimentality.

The leftist writer César M. Arconada denounced the attempt by some fascist intellectuals to resuscitate myths with the primary purpose of “ensoñar a la gente” [making people day-dream],³⁷ that is, to deceive them by disguising the political doctrine of fascism with a mantle of transcendence, novelty, and fascination, presenting it and its heirs as the solution for the current social crisis depicted as a sort of apocalypse. This, of course, is one aspect of the strategy of aestheticization of politics, which Walter Benjamin famously detected in fascist political discourses. In this sense, the character of Hermes stands on the threshold between what Frank Kermode named a “poetic fiction” and a “politicized myth.”³⁸ The first is used by artists to illuminate elusive aspects of contemporary reality, while the second, in the words of Roger Griffin, “become incorporated into the ideological rationale for attempts to engineer radical transformations of that reality.”³⁹

Tantalus, Earthly Truths, and Fate

In the years following the publication of *Hermes in the Streets* (1934), political unrest and conflict between intellectuals with divergent ideologies in Spain increased steadily. Everybody seemed to agree that the candid literature of the 20s was gone forever and that writing existed to show and demand commitment. What was at stake was the definition of this commitment and whether or not it implied a defined political standpoint. While the defenders of extreme positions (fascism and communism) were happy to equate writing with propaganda, pragmatically abandoning aesthetic concerns for a return to nineteenth century realism, some authors not ascribed to parties advocated for another way: a literature of solid moral compromise, sensible to the issues of the present times, but not hampered by party rules. These writers defended the accomplishments of the avant-garde in the previous decade

35 Obregón (1934), 165.

36 Obregón (1934), 214.

37 Arconada (1933/34), 23.

38 Quoted in Griffin (2007), 6.

39 Griffin (2007), 7.

and wanted to maintain the high standards of modern writing that made reading an aesthetic experience and not only a vehicle for indoctrination. This third way was under attack from both sides of the political spectrum and it came to an end with the start of the civil war in July of 1936.

The last novel I will discuss here is also the last one published before that date. Benjamín Jarnés (1888–1949) is considered the most important novelist of the Spanish avant-garde and the foremost defender of this third way. A liberal writer from the intellectual circle of the journal *Revista de Occidente* led by José Ortega y Gasset, since his first novel in 1926 Jarnés sustained a warm and sensual humanism in which literature stayed away from the political arena, to play a central role as a mechanism to invite readers to discover the possibilities of a deeper life and to foster solidarity. With the outbreak of the civil war, Jarnés stayed loyal to the Republic and in 1939 left Spain to live in exile in Mexico, along with many other Spanish intellectuals. But he was never able to overcome the trauma of the war and his literary production of the 40s until his death in 1949 never reached its pre-war quality.

Something that distinguishes Jarnés from the other two authors analyzed here is that, he offered a theoretical reflection on the standing of myth in the interwar years. Jarnés suggests three main uses of myth: the first and more superficial is its decorative use, according to which myths provide an arsenal of metaphors, names and stories for creators. A second and more substantive use of myth implies understanding them as “substances of man,”⁴⁰ i.e., as a catalog of the vast ways of feeling, thinking and acting that men may exhibit and that are reproduced through time. In the words of Jarnés, “[mythology] is a living language where the multiform dynamism of the world finds magnificent expression. Each term of this language is more than just the tale of a god or a hero; it represents perhaps one of our own reactions to blind chance, the master of our lives.”⁴¹

The third use is related to the aesthetic project mentioned above: positioning himself against a zeitgeist of skepticism and lack of solid references in the interwar years, Jarnés proposes the constitution of a new “faith on the earth” (i.e., a new desire of living, a lively optimism) that is partially supported by the construction of a new mythology. This ambitious mythopoesis means creating a new unitary but plural – if albeit fragmentary – representation of the meaning of existence that does not claim its foundation in transcendence, but somehow places divinity on earth. In order to do this, myths have to fulfill two functions: first, they must synthesize and flesh out “the elemental forces of life”

40 Jarnés (1935a), 5.

41 Jarnés (1941), 3.

(Eufrosina 67), that is, the affirmative impulses of life including the desire to realization, love, strength, courage, and intelligence. Second, the new mythology builds archetypes that synthesize desirable ways of living, role models or concrete aesthetic formulations of general and affirmative attitudes and behaviors. The mythological corpus available is not confined to classical antiquity, but may include the imagery of sacred history, Norse mythology or the Arthurian cycle. The right attitude of the modern writer is not to dismiss tradition, but to take profit from it through adaptation and modernization.⁴²

The novel *Tántalo*, published in 1935, offers a good example of the ways of reusing mythology according to Jarnés. Tantalus is a middle-aged man whose dream in life has been to become a successful playwright. When he was young, he managed to bring a play, *Penélope*, to the stage, but its terrible failure traumatized the author to such an extent that his nervous system was weakened. As a result, he decided never to release a play again. However, he continues to dedicate his life to the theater, tirelessly attending premieres, working behind the scenes and trying to understand the mechanisms that make a play successful. Unable to be either an author or a simple spectator, the protagonist spends decades experiencing the reactions from the audience to the works of others. It is in this sense that this man embodies Tantalus' punishment: he lives for what he cannot have, namely the glory of a successful premiere.⁴³

Eventually, though, we meet Arturo, a journalist who pities the protagonist and thus decides to produce one of his works, *Níobe* (the daughter of Tantalus in the original myth). Arturo is convinced that he can assuage the failed playwright's punishment and reverse fate. When *Níobe* finally opens and scores a deafening success, the playwright dies of a heart attack, overwhelmed by so much emotion. Escaping his eternal punishment – and fate – therefore means his fall and death: "Myth, cruelly, had crushed me, for wanting to reverse it."⁴⁴

Benjamín Jarnés himself had tried his hand as a playwright at the beginning of his career, and again in 1929, with little success. Though increasingly besieged by the popularity of movies and sporting events, theater remained in

42 Jarnés (1927), 3.

43 Let us briefly recall the original story: Tantalus was a son of Zeus and the nymph Plouto. Initially, Tantalus was welcomed to his father's table in Olympus, but one day he offered up his own son, Pelops, as a sacrifice. After cooking him, he served him up in a banquet for the gods, but they became aware of it and they did not touch the offering. Therefore, he got his eternal punishment in Tartarus that made him famous: he was made to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches. The water would always recede before he could take a drink, and the fruit would eternally elude his grasp. That is why Tantalus' punishment embodies the idea of temptation without satisfaction.

44 Jarnés (1935b), 177.

the interwar years the main form of entertainment in Spain and certainly the most lucrative business for a writer. Since the early twentieth century, Spanish theater underwent a permanent crisis of quality and creativity: it was primarily a trade show aimed at the entertainment of the masses without artistic pretensions, and consequently the sanction of the public was the main factor behind its success. The novel presents a farce of the theater industry and a critique of the inadequate caliber of national theater, burdened by some authors who have turned away quality in order to provide the public stereotypical and outdated products that pander to their basest passions. In contrast, we are told that the spectators “of Sophocles’ times”⁴⁵ found vital issues embodied in powerful characters, all in a show that demanded of them a great effort of assimilation and emotion.

Jarnés locates the reenactment of the myth in current times and offers a humorous reformulation through two formal procedures: the first, based on narrative structure, is to place the starting point of the story in a ridiculous, absurd or at least laughable situation. The second relates to focalization: the author presents a long and detailed analysis of characters showing their secrets, the daily life in which they are located, the small and modest actions being built. The discourse is thus dedicated to profane the story.

The novel opens with a “preliminary exhortation” by the author in which poets (and thus readers as well) are warned not to try to correct the myths, and therefore lives. The plot confirms the failure of these attempts at rectification and produces a moral message. The work is an ironic, though bitter complaint. It has a background of conservatism, even resignation, and projects dissatisfaction with what are seen as deviations from the beaten path. The novel assumes that a person’s course cannot or should not be modified because it could lead to his destruction. Similarly, the affirmation of the recurrence of a myth implies a tragic perspective that seems to advise against changes, or reject the possibility of amendment and improvement. The novel projects a view of history where there is no room for revolution and where civilizing progress is material but not cultural. The plot of the novel repeats one basic conflict of classical tragedy: he who defies the gods and intends to “rectify” decisions pays for it.⁴⁶ Here the myth is configured as a synthesis of a moral, that is, a precept, or even a warning that seems to hold some sort of timeless value. All this despite the ironic tone that may dominate the narrative, which enables the reader to relativize – but not the exclude – the ethical component of the text.

45 Jarnés (1935b), 25.

46 Jarnés (1935b), 89.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of three novels, I hope to have shown that the reception of classical antiquity by the Spanish avant-garde literature was more than just intertextual game, and even went beyond the mythical method proposed by Eliot. *Moon of Cups* offers a diagnosis of the excesses of the new forms of life of the roaring twenties through the figure of the god Bacchus as epochal phenotype. *Hermes in the Streets* proposes Hermes as a proto-fascist hero of modern times: ambitious, elitist, mendacious and amoral. Finally, in his rewriting of the myth of Tantalus, Jarnés issues a warning during revolutionary times against doing away with timeless teachings and changing things too quickly. In short, these three novels are examples of a wider production in which classical reception serves to interpret and judge the moral ambience of contemporary reality. Thus, Spanish avant-garde literature follows a modernist trend that compensates a loss in the confidence of rationalism with an attempt to deliver what Cathy Gere has called “the pagan reenchantment of secular modernity.”⁴⁷

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47 Gere (2010), 7.

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The Classical Ideal in Fernando Pessoa

Kenneth David Jackson

Prefere [...] uma outra (leitura) materialista, à luz do epicurismo grego, e que responde tanto à sua formação clássica, quanto a um certo “mood” do tempo, propenso ao ceticismo voluptuário.¹

[He prefers . . . another materialist reading, in light of Greek Epicureanism, which reflects as much (Fitzgerald’s) classical education as a certain “mood” of the time, which tends to voluptuous skepticism.]



The role of classicism in the thought and writings of the early twentieth-century Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) is particularly complex, as the literary scholar Luís de Sousa Rebelo observes in his thoughtful, comprehensive treatment of the subject in “Fernando Pessoa e a Tradição Clássica” [Fernando Pessoa and the Classical Tradition].² Pessoa was first of all a supreme modernist poet, a posture prepared and imbued in a foundational sense by an education in classical literature, mythology, and philosophy; yet the classical component that plays a prominent role in his writings and aesthetics remains only one dimension of many in a changeable and often contradictory mosaic that incorporated authors and genres selected from a broad and diverse historical literary past into a modernist conception.³ Pessoa as author made use of tension and paradox to assure that contradictory parts of his artistic world could not be unified into a single comprehensible entity, but would remain parts without a whole, beyond the organic identity of an individual artist or aesthetic position. His goal was to direct a literary universe of multiple authors, while pursuing a supreme reality beyond their comprehension. Rather than reliable influences, in that sense, literary traditions served as incongruent

1 Campos (1983), 58–64.

2 All translations my own except where noted. Rebelo (1982), 280–308.

3 Jackson (2010).

components of the multiple personalities, genres, aesthetics, and even languages that constituted the constellation of his literary universe. Classicism may thus be considered one of his adverse genres, although perhaps the source most pertinent to his philosophical stance, from which he borrowed form but altered its contents as a way to authenticate, motivate, and historicize his modernist agenda, particularly through his association of classicism with primitivism. Sousa Rebelo remarks that readers may find it perplexing that a great vanguardist poet who carried out a profound literary revolution reflected on the themes and spirit of classicism.⁴ Within that agenda the presence of classicism is perceptible throughout his writings and thought: in a material view of the world, in the presence of poetry in everything, in the dialectical relationship between classical and decadent art in the young Pessoa's Victorian education in South Africa, in his rejection of Christian philosophy and esthetics, in the imitation of a classical world from which he is irrevocably removed, and in the poetry of the heteronyms who constitute a coterie of invented literary persona who make up Pessoa's literary universe.

The role of classical culture and literature in Fernando Pessoa's generation is foregrounded in the titles of the literary journals that Pessoa supported and in which he published many of his most significant works. *ORPHEU* (1915), in the judgment of scholar and poet Adolfo Casais Monteiro, questioned the very foundations of literature, and Pessoa referred to it as a moment of initiation ("de ocasião e início"); *Centauro* (1916), in the view of poet Nuno Júdice, projected a flavor of decadence and exoticism, marked as much by musicality as by a break with the forms of symbolism. *Athena*, with five numbers from October 1924 to February 1925, was for Pessoa a magazine composed purely of art, interpreted by critic Teresa Sousa de Almeida as a vehicle invented for staging or presentation of Pessoa's works. There, Pessoa published the odes of Ricardo Reis, the first poems of Alberto Caeiro, translations from the *Greek Anthology*, and a celebrated essay on metaphysics by Álvaro de Campos. Pessoa pays homage to Orpheus by collecting his poems in a songbook ("Cancioneiro") and to Athena, the goddess in whose name he publishes his "pure art." In the essay "A revivescência do ideal grego antigo" [The revival of the ancient Greek ideal], Pessoa asserts that the poetry of Alberto Caeiro brings back to life the Greek ideal of beauty. In considering Pessoa's English "Inscriptions," the critic Yara Frateschi Vieira in her perceptive study "Pessoa, Leitor da Antologia Grega" [Pessoa, Reader of the Greek Anthology] notes the juxtaposition of classical character and modern theme.⁵

4 Rebelo (1982), 283.

5 Vieira (1991), 439–69.

Classicism presented as philosophy and aesthetics, as Pessoa encountered them in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts, sets the scope, proportion, and concept of his literary project. His admiration for the Greek ideal rests on what he considered to be its role as the source of all art:

O movimento da ode grega – strofe, antistrophe, epodo – [...] Este triplo movimento não é só a lei da ode, o fundamento eterno da poesia lírica; é, mais, a lei orgânica da disciplina mental [...] (tese, antítese, síntese).⁶

[The movement of the Greek ode – strophe, antístrophe, epode – [...] This triple movement is not only the law of the ode, the eternal foundation of lyrical poetry; it is more, the organizing law of mental discipline [...] (thesis, antithesis, synthesis).]

He attributes to the Greeks the invention of unity and organic construction in art:

Foram os primeiros a tê-la [...] na literatura, onde pela primeira vez no mundo aparece a noção da unidade, da construção, da organicidade da obra de arte [...]⁷

[They were the first to have it...in literature, where for the first time in the world the notion of unity appears, of construction, of an organic work of art...]

Writing in *Athena*, he asserts that the civilized man of his day, beyond his own nationality, owes a second allegiance to ancient Greece, which is the origin of “all that moves in this world.”⁸ He admires the Greek ode, conceived with amplitude, discipline and intelligence: “O grego aceitava, a mãos plenas, a experiência integral da vida da emoção; e a essa experiência plena impunha a disciplina da sua inteligência (abstrata)” [The Greek accepted with open arms the full experience of a life of emotion; and to that complete experience imposed the discipline of his (abstract) intelligence].⁹

Pessoa aspires toward a similar pure objectivity in poetic art, removed from emotion, a position that pre-dates T. S. Eliot’s celebrated notion of “objective correlative:”

6 Pessoa (1982), 289.

7 Pessoa (1982), 182.

8 Pessoa (1982), 252.

9 Pessoa (1982), 290.

Quanto mais fria a poesia, mais verdadeira. A emoção não deve entrar na poesia senão como elemento dispositivo do ritmo, que é a sobrevivência longínqua da música no verso. E esse ritmo, quando é perfeito, deve surgir da idéia que da palavra. Uma idéia perfeitamente concebida e rítmica em si mesma [...]

[The more cold is poetry, the more true. Emotion should not enter in poetry except as a dispositive rhythmic element, which is the distant survival of music in verse. And that rhythm, when it is perfect, should arise from the idea that give it words. An idea perfectly conceived and rhythmic in itself [...]]¹⁰

In South Africa, where he lived from 1896–1905, Pessoa's classical ideas were formed by his education in English literature at the Durban High School.¹¹ His contact with the classics was that found in the study of Latin and of English literature, which formed his early intellectual foundation with the Victorians, Milton, Shakespeare, the Elizabethans and Romantics.¹² In British South Africa, an education in Greco-Roman classics was considered essential for the development of a Victorian gentleman.¹³ Sousa Rebelo points out that although classical culture was quite well known in Portugal at the time, it was not as lively or strong as in Britain, where classical tradition was a basis for thinking about modernity. Bilingual editions, particularly from the Greek, allowed Pessoa to

10 Pessoa (1982), 143.

11 See Severino (1983).

12 Judging from the titles found in his library, António Pina Coelho (1971) cites poetical works by Blake, Donne, Jonson and his *Lives of the Poets*, Marvell, Milton, Shakespeare, Longfellow, Lowell, Coleridge, Rossetti, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Browning, and the Victorians. Pessoa read Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and G. K. Chesterton's *The Victorian Age in Literature*, Roma Claire's *Modern American Verse*, George Gilfillan's *A Gallery of Literary Portraits*, and Henry Hallam's *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*. He combined Poe with E. R. Pike's *Slayers of Superstition* and delved into literary studies and biographies, from J. M. Robertson's *The Genuine in Shakespeare*, Arthur Ransome's *Oscar Wilde, A Critical Study* to Lytton Strachey's *Books and Characters*, John Addington Symonds' *Shelley*, and William Trent's *John Milton, Life and Works*.

13 According to Coelho (1971), in Pessoa's copy of Aeschylus' *Prométhée Enchaîné*, the Greek text is underlined. The signature of Charles Robert Anon, an early heteronymic personality, is written in *The Revised Latin Primer* (1898) and in *Arnold's Latin Primer* (1904), according to João Dionísio (*Poemas Ingleses*, Tomo II, 9). His readings in classical scholars of the Victorian period is documented in library copies of such works as J. F. Dobson's *The Greek Orators*, L. M. J. Garnet's *Greek Folk Poesy*, R. W. Livingstone's *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to Us*, or Gilbert Murray's *Euripides and his Age*. Coelho (1971), 45.

reflect on classical authors and thought. The original philosophical development in his works is said to derive from these sources.¹⁴ Vieira studies Pessoa's use of W. R. Paton's translation of *The Greek Anthology*, perhaps the supreme example of the influence of Hellenistic aestheticism popular in Victorian England.¹⁵ Pessoa developed his poetic ideas in this historical-literary context (Vieira, 441) and certainly read John Addington Symond's essay "Antinoo," (in *Sketches And Studies In Italy*, 1879),¹⁶ the title of Pessoa's first volume of poetry, written in English (1918).¹⁷

The Victorians provided the classical framework for a project that would widen to encompass an historical and critical view of the Western tradition. After his return to Portugal in 1905, Pessoa would absorb the weight of the classical tradition in Portuguese literature, shaped by a Victorian education in literature and philosophy. He enrolled in the Curso Superior de Letras, 1906–07, in the disciplines of Greek and Philosophy, although he soon left university study for a private life of research.¹⁸ Classicism was an ideal to be imitated aesthetically; while irretrievable lost in time, it coexisted dialectically with the air of decadence in his own age and the improbability and fragmentation of his own literary project.¹⁹ Pessoa's essays on paganism reveal the Hellenistic ideal to mean for him both an irrecoverable origin and an aesthetic sense admired and absorbed by contemporary decadence, which has its roots in

14 Sousa Rebelo (1982), 283.

15 The *Greek Anthology* is a collection of poems of Hellenic antiquity organized by Constantino Céfalas in 980 and enlarged by the *Palatina Anthology* discovered in 1606. It attracted numerous translators in Victorian England.

16 Symonds (1879), 47–90.

17 In a study of Pessoa's poetry in English, Anne Terlinden (1990) notes that Pessoa could have become the English writer he wished to be had circumstances been slightly different. Yet Pessoa continued to write in English throughout his life, and according to Jorge de Sena (1973) many of his great poems were thought in that language. The two books he published in 1918 projected the anomaly of an English poet publishing in Lisbon: *Antinous* and *35 Sonnets*. These were followed in 1921 by *English Poems I–II* and *English Poems III*, volumes published by the press Pessoa founded expressly for that purpose, Olisipo, a name reminiscent of Odysseus and of Lisbon's classical origin.

18 Sousa Rebelo (1982), 281.

19 Scholarly works that he may have read include Graham R. Tomson, Richard Garnett, and Andrew Lang's *Selections from the Greek Anthology* (London, 1899), J. W. Mackail's *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (London, 1890), W. H. D. Rouse's *An Echo of Greek Song* (London, 1899), W. R. Paton's *Anthologiae Graecae Erotica: The Love Epigrams or Book V of the Palatine Anthology* (London, 1898), or the Earl of Cromer's *Translations and Paraphrases from the Greek Anthology* (1903).

the glorification of classical ruins in the European imagination. In “Clássicos, Românticos e Decadentes,” for instance, he writes:

O verdadeiro artista clássico [...] pensa primeiro seu poema, e depois sente sobre a base desse pensamento. Podemos encontrar bem perto de nossos tempos alguns excelentes exemplos disto: como o Moisés, de Alfred de Vigny, que é patentemente uma idéia elaborada através da emoção; como Scholar Gipsy, de Arnold; *The Hound of Heaven*, de Francis Thompson [...], a grande Ode de Wordsworth. Não é necessário acrescentar que toda grande arte é clássica, mesmo liricamente; pois nenhuma arte é grande se não nos toca o pensamento em todos os pontos, tanto pelo sentimento, como pela razão. Isto nenhum poema faz como o poema clássico assim composto. Enquanto que, em seu desenvolvimento, desperta nosso sentimento, desperta-o apenas para que tal sentimento possa dar vida à idéia imanente que, quando o poema é plenamente lido, emerge por inteiro. Nenhum grande poema lírico jamais foi composto sem ser de acordo com este esquema raciocinado ou instintivo.²⁰

[The true classical artist [...] first thinks his poem and later feels on the basis of his thought. We can find some excellent examples very close to our time: like “Moses” of Alfred by Vigny, which is patently an idea elaborated through emotion; like “Scholar Gipsy” of Arnold; “The Hound of Heaven” by Francis Thompson...; the great Ode by Wordsworth. It is unnecessary to add that all great art is classic, even lyrically; given that no art is great if it does not touch our thought in every point, as much by sentiment as by reason. This no poem does like the classical poem so composed. While in its development it awakens our feelings, it awakens only feelings that can give life to an innate idea that, when the poem is fully read, emerges whole. No great lyric poem was ever composed without being in accord with this reasoned or instinctive scheme.]

At the same time, Pessoa was aware of his separation from an understanding of classicism in its own time which made of him a decadent writer aware both of the archaic quality of the poetry he idealized and of the exaggerated perfection with which it was sought:

A nossa ânsia de beleza clássica é toda cristã na sua fúria de perfeição, no seu desassossego [...] Amamos a beleza demasiadamente: os gregos não

20 Pessoa (1982), 294–5.

a amaram assim. Para o seu sentimento possuía a calma da lucidez com que viam...²¹

[Our anxiety for classical beauty is totally Christian in its fury for perfection, in its disquietude [...] We love beauty excessively: the Greeks did not love it that way. Their feelings possessed the lucid calm with which they viewed it [...]]

The close association of classicism to decadence links Victorianism to the concept of an earlier lost or archaic ideal that must be reclaimed: “Chamemos à nossa obra de ‘reconstrução pagã’ porque ela o é, sem que o queiramos” [We call our work “pagan reconstruction” because that is what it is, whether we wish it to be or not].²² Here is the explanation why Pessoa’s sensationism rejects from classicism its equal treatment of all subjects, its limited vision, its simple expressions, and the reduction of artistic temperament to a minimum, while maintaining praise for its concept of art as intellectual construction (“O Sensacionismo rejeita do classicismo”, 19966b, 188).

The scholar Georg Lind was the first to point out that Greco-Roman objectivism in Pessoa came from English classicism and referenced Pessoa’s careful study of Matthew Arnold’s *Essays in Criticism*, where in Arnold’s translations of Homer Pessoa notes questions of semantic equivalence, contrastive stylistics, and concrete language between Greek and English versions.²³ Pessoa’s concept of Neopaganism extends to his reading of Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) on the question of seeing things as they are. Pessoa had also read Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1915) on the matter, although he would come to reject Nietzsche, Pater, Arnold and Oscar Wilde as false followers because of what he considered to be Christian bias:²⁴ “Nietzsche... é melhor que não falemos, tão repelentemente cristã se contorce aquela débil e doentia mentalidade” [Nietzsche... best we don’t speak, so repellently Christian twisting that weak and sickly mentality].²⁵ Sousa Rebelo is perhaps the first to note the importance to Pessoa of Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*

21 Pessoa (1982), 179.

22 Pessoa (1982), 146. Pessoa further questions whether Christianity is a mere prolongation of Greco-Roman paganism. Pessoa (1982), 184.

23 Rebelo (1982), 285. In his library Pessoa also possessed Arnold’s translation, *The thoughts of Marcus Aurelius... his life and an essay on his philosophy*, together with Cicero’s essay on friendship (1908) and *The poems of Matthew Arnold* (1910).

24 Rebelo (1982), 288.

25 Pessoa (1982), 173.

of the Roman Empire (1776–78) for the development of his Paganism, although not found in Pessoa's personal library, as it places the birth of Christianity at the moment of decadence of the Roman Empire.²⁶ Sousa Rebelo suggests that Pessoa could have been made more aware of the decadentist or estheticist approach to classicism in the writings of the Victorian esthetes and decadents through Pater's *Marius the Epicurian. His sensations and ideas* (1885). Although it did not convey the purity Pessoa sought in classical sources it was nevertheless a probable critical embryo of Reis's Epicureanism. Reis stated that it was not enough to think of classicism intellectually but only through one's sensibility.²⁷

The scholar Alberto da Costa e Silva makes the case that Pessoa's acquaintance with Greek culture, with roots in British South Africa, was nourished through readings of English Victorian and French Parnassian poets. Costa e Silva thinks that Pessoa's intention was to write Greek and Latin poems in Portuguese, reinventing their forms in another language to the point of preserving anachronistic diction in Portuguese.²⁸ Costa e Silva points out the classical tastes of Parnassian poets, noting similarities between the odes of Ricardo Reis and poems by the French poet Leconte de Lisle (1818–1894). In the case of Pessoa's oft-repeated phrase "navegar é preciso, viver não é preciso" [to sail is necessary, to live is not necessary], Costa e Silva observes that the Latin original from Plutarch ("Navigare necesse est, vivere non est necesse") never appears in Pessoa, rather Pessoa finds it in D'Annunzio.²⁹ Sousa Rebelo notes that when Pessoa invents his theory of Sensationism around 1913–14, he brings ideas from classicism into his theories of Paganism and Neopaganism that form a basis for his critique of Christianity, as found in works attributed to Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos and António Mora. What he carried to his poetic universe from the classical tradition, as filtered through these poets, was an idea of the fleeting and imperfect nature of life and the beauty and permanence of each brief instant.³⁰

An anglophile and bilingual, Pessoa's two early long dramatic poems in English are "Antinoo," in 48 sections, with 362 verses, and "Epithalamium," in 21 numbered and titled chapters. Parts were written from 1913–1915 and published in Lisbon in 1918 and 1921. They dramatize Pessoa's obsession with Greek

26 Rebelo (1982), 286.

27 Pessoa (1982), 187.

28 Costa e Silva (2006), 71.

29 The citation is found in a drawing by De Carolis on the titlepage of Book IV from the 1912 edition of *Laudi del cielo, del mare, della terra et degli Eroi*. D'Annunzio (1912).

30 Rebelo (1982), 72.

pansexuality on themes of homosexual love and lustful copulation, according to the literary scholar Jorge de Sena in his general introduction to Pessoa's English poems. Sena finds antecedents to the atmosphere of "Antinoo" in Oscar Wilde's poem "The Sphynx" (1881) and a character analysis in John Addington Symond's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883).³¹ Antinous (111–130) was a Bithynian youth who became a favorite of the emperor Hadrian, who sought to deify him after his mysterious death on the Nile by organizing a cult for his worship. His name became associated with homosexuality in Western culture. Sena considers the story of Antinous to constitute the last burning episode of paganism in the world of the Roman Empire, one he traces in Western literature to Baudelaire's *Danse Macabre*, Balzac's *Illusions Perdues*, Wilde, and Proust's *La Race Maudite* (1908–10). Baudelaire alludes to Antinous as a decadent prefiguration of death, "Antinoüs flétris, dandys à face glabre, Cadavres vernissés, lovelaces chenus" [Withered Antinoi, dandies with smooth faces, Varnished corpses, hoary-haired lovelaces],³² while Balzac evokes his statuesque image, "Il était beaux, mais ridiculement mis. Habillez l'Apollon du Belvédér ou l'Antinoüs en porteur d'eau, reconnaitrez-vous alors la divine création du ciseau grec ou romain?"³³ [Put Antinous or the Apollo Belvedere himself into a water-carrier's blouse, and how shall you recognize the godlike creature of the Greek or Roman chisel?].³⁴ The erotic themes are filtered through Victorian estheticism using the English language as a disguise. Whether as divinization in "Antinoo" or as orgiastic consummation in "Epithalamium," the broadly discursive dramatizations amount in Sena's view to an exorcism of the young poet's obsession with virginity and homosexuality.³⁵

Victorian predilection for the Greek epigram is reflected in the "Inscriptions," written in English, dated as early as 1907, and prepared for publication in 1919–1920. They were possibly inspired according to scholar George Monteiro by the publication of translations from the *Greek Anthology* in *The Athenaeum*; Pessoa published the inscriptions in *English Poems I–II* (1921) after the demise of the English journal.³⁶ Pessoa would balance the theme of the beautiful adolescent, scandalous for the times, with the noble "Inscriptions," the fourteen poems of tomb epitaphs that Sena considers to be direct imitations of the *Greek Anthology*. Vieira notes that Pessoa possessed the five volumes

31 Sena (1974).

32 Baudelaire (1972), 228.

33 Balzac (1990), 187.

34 Balzac (1899), 6.

35 Sena (1974), 34.

36 They were next published in Pessoa (1974), 63–71.

of W. R. Paton's translation (1916–18) in his library, observing that his translation to Portuguese of eight epigrams published in *Athena* in November 1924 were based on Paton's English translations rather than the original Greek.³⁷

Pessoa's "Inscriptions" confirm the confluence of classical education and English culture, conforming to his secondary education in colonial Durban. Vieira considers Pessoa to retain the formal concision of poetry of the *Greek Anthology* while altering its expressive content: "Enquanto na *Antologia* sabe-se sempre quem fala, aqui os fatores referenciais são genéricos, como tomados à distância [...] uma depuração da *Antologia Grega*" [While in the *Anthology* one always knows who is speaking, here the references are generic, as if from a distance [...] a purification of the *Greek Anthology*].³⁸ Pessoa's fourteen inscriptions reflecting classical epitaphs are shaped into a unified sequence of metaphysical poems, as confirmed by the poet in Inscription XIII:

The work is done. The hammer is laid down.
The artisans, that built the slow-grown town,
Have been succeeded by those who still built.
All this is something lack-of-something screening,
The thought whole has no meaning
But lies by Time's wall like a pitcher spilt.

As an organic series the "Inscriptions" are comparable in presentation to the 49 poems in Alberto Caeiro's "Guardador de Rebanhos," published in *Athena* (1924), as these are also sequenced in an exposition of Pessoa's philosophy of mystery and absence of meaning that reaches an early apotheosis in the fifth poem of the sequence: "V. Há metafísica bastante em não pensar em nada" [There is enough metaphysics in thinking of nothing].

Commenting on Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyám, Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos imagined that at the moment of translation of the Persian text, Fitzgerald would find the work archaic, part of a poetic tradition that one would have to know by heart to feel its meaning fully.³⁹ Thus in "Clássicos, Românticos e Decadentes," Pessoa would state, "I am a decadent poet."⁴⁰ Like Fitzgerald, Pessoa would find himself attracted to archaic English poetry, to stoicism and Epicureanism, and to what Campos characterizes in Victorian culture as a propensity to "voluptuous skepticism." Pessoa's position

37 Vieira (1991), 439.

38 Vieira (1991), 445–8.

39 Campos (1983), 62.

40 Pessoa (1982), 301.

is similar to that described by Havelock Ellis in his often republished introduction to J. K. Huysmans' *Against the Grain*:

Thus what we call classic corresponds on the spiritual side to the love of natural things, and what we call decadent to the research for the things which seem to lie beyond Nature [...] Technically, a decadent style is only such in relation to a classic style, a further specialization, the homogeneous, in Spenserian phraseology, having become heterogeneous. The first is beautiful because the parts are subordinated to the whole; the second is beautiful because the whole is subordinated to the parts [...]

In each case the earlier and classic manner – for the classic manner, being more closely related to the ends of utility, must always be earlier – subordinates the parts to the whole, and strives after those virtues which the whole may best express; the later manner depreciates the importance of the whole for the benefit of its parts, and strives after the virtues of individuality. All art is the rising and falling on the slopes of a rhythmic curve between these two classic and decadent extremes.⁴¹

Pessoa's literary project could be said to rest on revisiting the diaspora and dilution of classical aesthetic ideals found among Victorian writers and artists that enveloped him, which he develops in poetry and in essays on paganism: "Reconstruir o paganismo envolve, pois, como primeira ação intelectual, fazer renascer o objetivismo puro dos gregos e dos romanos ["To reconstruct paganism involves, as a first intellectual action, to resurrect the pure objectivism of the Greeks and Romans"].⁴² Pessoa's elevation of the Hellenic ideal can be compared to that of the English classical revivalist artist Frederick Leighton (1830–1896), who believed in the ideals of beauty, order, harmony, unity, and perfection, reproduced noble decorative figures, and was an admirer of simplicity and directness.⁴³ In an essay on the poet António Botto, Pessoa enumerated clearly the characteristics of the Hellenic aesthetic ideal in art:

A calma, o equilíbrio, a harmonia, característicos distintivos, com outros, que os não contradizem, da arte grega, provam bem que não é abusiva a atribuição desta íntima direção lógica ao caminho do instinto helênico para o ideal estético absoluto [...] Quando o heleno pretende pôr em arte o seu ideal, isto é, quando o ideal helênico assume o aspecto criador

41 Ellis (1924), xii.

42 Pessoa (1982), 186.

43 Cited in Wood (1983), 23. See also Jones, et al. (1983).

ou ativo, são três as formas de manifestação por que revela [...] Na primeira, e mais alta, dessas formas, o heleno, vendo que a vida é imperfeita, busca criar, ele, a perfeição, substituindo a arte à vida...

Na segunda, e media, dessas formas, o heleno sentindo que a vida é imperfeita, busca aperfeiçoá-la em si próprio, vivendo-a com uma compreensão intensa...

Na terceira, e ínfima, dessas formas, o heleno, vendo e sentindo vagamente a imperfeição das cousas, porém sem força espiritual [...] decide aceitá-las como se fossem perfeitas, escolhendo em cada uma aquele momento, aquele gesto, aquela passagem que de tal modo encheu a nossa capacidade de sensação que naquele momento, naquele gesto, naquela passagem, a sentimos perfeita. É esta a forma sensual do ideal estético absoluto... vazia, porque... é estética e mais nada [...]⁴⁴

[The calm, the equilibrium, the harmony, distinctive characteristics along with others from Greek art that support them, well prove that it is not excessive to attribute such an intimate logical direction to the Hellenic path toward an absolute esthetic ideal [...] When Greeks strive to put their ideal in art, that is, when the Hellenic ideal assumes a creative or active aspect, there are three manifestations that reveal it [...] In the first and highest of such forms, feeling that life is imperfect, the Hellenic artist tries to perfect it in himself by living it with an intense understanding [...] In the third and least of these forms, seeing and feeling vaguely the imperfection of things, yet without any spiritual force [...] he decides to accept them as if they were perfect... That is the sensual form of the ideal esthetic absolute... empty, because... it is esthetics and nothing more....]

Pessoa wrote so extensively in essays on Paganism and Neo-paganism that Sousa Rebelo felt the need to affirm that Pessoa was a poet rather than a philosopher; it is in his poetry, however, that he expressed and developed the concepts in his essays. "I was a poet animated by philosophy, not a philosopher with poetic faculties," so Pessoa described his relationship with philosophy.⁴⁵ Even so, after returning from South Africa to Lisbon in 1905 at age 17, Pessoa wrote that he read Greek and German philosophers intensively: "No que posso chamar a minha terceira adolescência, passada aqui em Lisboa, vivi na atmosfera dos filósofos gregos e alemães [...]" [In what I can call my

44 Pessoa (1982), 352.

45 Pessoa (1966b), 13.

third adolescence, spent here in Lisbon, I lived in the atmosphere of Greek and German philosophers].⁴⁶ Many scholars consider philosophy to be a point of departure for his literary works.⁴⁷ Coelho finds the origins of Pessoa's paganism in his reading of the pre-socratics: "Os estudos relativos à filosofia pré-socrática, antes de tudo, animaram Pessoa a esboçar uma estética neo-pagã que viria a propagar-se pelos heterónimos [...]" [The studies of pre-socratic philosophy, above all, prepared Pessoa to sketch out an esthetics of neo-pagan philosophy that he would propagate through the heteronyms].⁴⁸ Sousa Rebelo expands this observation to identify the core of Pessoa's philosophical outlook as a whole in Stoicism and theses of the pre-Socratics: "O sensacionismo pessoano é, pois, uma filosofia materialista que crê firmamente na existência do mundo exterior e procura examinar, por isso mesmo, a transmutação do concreto na sensibilidade estética." [Pessoa's sensationism is, after all, a materialist philosophy that believes firmly in the existence of the exterior world and for that reason tries to examine the transmutation of what is concrete into esthetic sensibility].⁴⁹

Paganism is a guide to Pessoa's Hellenism, to his esthetic theory, and to the materialistic poetic philosophy of Alberto Caeiro, with the important proviso that awareness of his separation from classical reality created an enduring consciousness of imitation that marked both his philosophy and poetry.

Pessoa states in an essay that the fundamental work of his theory of Neopaganism is Alberto Caeiro's long poem, "O Guardador de Rebanhos."⁵⁰ In the poetry of Caeiro Pessoa claims to have put all of his "dramatic depersonalization." In a letter to critic Adolfo Casais Monteiro on January 13, 1935, Pessoa gave him a brief biography: "Alberto Caeiro nasceu em 1889 e morreu em 1915; nasceu em Lisboa, mas viveu quase toda a sua vida no campo. Não teve profissão nem educação quase alguma... Caeiro era de estatura média, e, embora realmente frágil (morreu tuberculoso), não parecia tão frágil como era." [Albert Caeiro was born in 1889 and died in 1915; he was born in Lisbon, but lived almost his whole life in the countryside. He never had a profession

46 Pessoa (1999), 279.

47 See, for instance, Estibeira (2008).

48 Coelho (1971), 169. After citing works of philosophy in Pessoa's library, Coelho enumerates classical philosophers of interest or influence, including Thales of Miletus, Aristotle, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Xenofanes, the Eleatas school, Xenofanes, Parmenides, Zeno of Eleia, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Leucipo of Mileto, Democritus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Hipias, Prodicus, Socrates, Plato and Plotinus. Coelho (1971), 50–1.

49 Rebelo (1982), 292.

50 Pessoa (1982), 170.

and hardly any education [...] Caeiro was of medium height, and although in reality weak (he died of tuberculosis), he didn't look as fragile as he was]. Caeiro's rational mysticism gives a voice to Pessoa's primitivism, which in an essay he describes as heterodox:

[...] dou ao paganismo uma interpretação diversa da da maioria deles; mais lata, me parece, mais doentia, quero crer; mas diferente, e isso é o que importa. Na sua maioria eles são o que posso designar por pagãos ortodoxos, filhos da primitividade grega, crentes imediatos na realidade e na agência dos Deuses. Eu sou um pagão decadente, do tempo do outono da Beleza, do sonolecer [?] da limpidez antiga, místico intelectual da raça triste dos neoplatônicos da Alexandria.⁵¹

[...] I give to Paganism a diverse interpretation from most of them; wider, it seems to me, unhealthy, I like to believe; but different, that is what is important. In the majority they are what I can designate orthodox pagans, born from Greek primitiveness, immediate believers in reality and in the agency of the Gods. I am a decadent pagan, from the time of the autumn of Beauty, of the somnolence of ancient limpidity, a mystical intellectual of the sad race of the Neoplatonists from Alexandria.]

Pessoa creates Alberto Caeiro to be the poet who will embody absolute materialist objectivity in universal ideas, comprehended intellectually: “[...] são raros os que existiram para si próprios com plena objetividade” [“rare are those who exist for themselves with full objectivity”]. In the poems of “O Guardador de Rebanhos,” Caeiro embodies what Pessoa calls the firmly objective character of paganism, which locates reality spontaneously in exterior nature:

XXXIX

O mystério das cousas, onde está elle?
Onde está elle que não aparece
Pelo menos a mostrar-nos que é mystério?

Que sabe o rio d'isso e que sabe a árvore?
E eu, que não sou mais do que elles, que sei d'isso? [...]

Porque o único sentido oculto das cousas
E' ellas não terem sentido oculto nenhum.⁵²

51 Pessoa (1966b), 228.

52 Pessoa (1982), 186.

[The great mystery of things, where is it?
Where is it that it doesn't come out
At least to show us that it is mysterious?

What does the river know of this and the tree?
And I, no more than these, what do I know of it? [...]

Because the only hidden meaning of things
Is their having no hidden meaning at all.]

Caeiro is the master of all heteronyms because he understands and lives the ideals of paganism naturally, eliminating from his sensations or emotions all that is individual in favor of what is universal and intelligible: "Tem o indivíduo que nascer com a inteligência para compreendê-las colocada no centro da sua sensibilidade [...]. Mesmo uma teoria filosófica do paganismo não é possível a quem não tenha uma organização nativamente objetivista da inteligência e da sensibilidade [...]" [The individual has to be born with the intelligence to understand them at the center of his sensibility [...]. Even a theory of paganism is not intelligible to whomever does not possess an objective organization of intelligence and sensibility].⁵³ Caeiro's stoicism lies in his indifference to passions, his acceptance of the laws of destiny, his self-discipline, and his wish to conform to the ways of Nature.

To stoicism Pessoa would add the "sad Epicureanism" of the heteronym Ricardo Reis. Reis writes only odes: "Ricardo Reis nasceu em 1887 ... no Porto, educado num colégio de jesuítas, é, como disse, médico; vive no Brasil desde 1919, pois se expatriou espontaneamente por ser monárquico. É um latinista por educação alheia, e um semi-helenista por educação própria." [Ricardo Reis was born in 1887 [...] in Porto, was educated in a Jesuit highschool and, as I said, is a doctor who has been living in Brazil since 1919, when being a monarchist he spontaneously exiled himself. He is a Latinist by education and a self-taught semi-Hellenist].

Born in Porto one year before Pessoa, educated by Jesuits although a self-educated Latinist and Hellenist, Reis's first twenty odes in the Horatian manner appeared in *Athena* in 1924. Combining stoicism with Epicureanism, the main principles of Reis's philosophical outlook include *carpe diem*, *ataraxia* (happiness with tranquility), suppression of instincts, resignation to destiny, seeking an erudite calm or at least its illusion, cultivating beauty to disguise the brevity, the misery of life, and the absence of passion and liberty denied by the gods. The serenity of his pose is undercut, however, by his pervasive Christian

53 Pessoa (1982), 187.

mindfulness of the brevity of life and the suffering brought by human emotions. Thus his relationship with the muses is one of virtual passion, muted, delayed, and ultimately absorbed into the flux of time and fate:

II

As rosas amo dos jardins de Adónis,
 Essas volucres amo, Lídia, rosas,
 Que em o dia em que nascem
 Em esse dia morrem.
 A luz para elas é eternal, porque
 Nascem nascido já o sol, e acabam
 Antes que Apolo deixe
 O seu curso visível.
 Assim façamos nossa vida um dia,
 Inscientes, Lídia, voluntariamente
 Que há noite antes e após
 O pouco que duramos.

[I love the roses in Adonis' garden,
 I love these climbers, Lydia, roses
 That one day are born
 And die the same day.
 Light for them eternal, because
 The sun is up before them, and
 They finish before Apollo
 Completes his daily round.
 So should our life be a day,
 Lydia, willingly unaware
 That there is night before and after
 The little time we endure.]⁵⁴

The ode is an adverse genre because Reis borrows Horatian language and theme to express modernist emptiness and uncertainty:

XI

Temo, Lidia, o destino. Nada é certo.
 Em qualquer hora pode suceder-nos

54 Selected unpublished translations of the odes by Ben Norwood can be found in Jackson (2010).

O que nos tudo muda.
 Fora do conhecido é estranho o passo
 Que próprio damos. Graves numes guardam
 As lindas do que é uso.
 Não somos deuses: cegos, receemos,
 E a parca dada vida antepoñhamos
 À novidade, abismo.

[Lydia, I fear destiny. Nothing is certain.
 At any time that which changes all
 Can happen.
 Beyond the known is the path given us,
 The strange one. Grave spirits guard
 Its beauties.
 We are not gods; we blindly receive,
 And the slight gift, life, we set anew
 Before the abyss.]⁵⁵

Traces of classicism visible in Pessoa's thoughts and in these two heteronyms include odes of Ricardo Reis drawn from Horace, Alberto Caeiro's stoic oneness with nature, Caeiro's revival of paganism and resistance to the decadence of poetics. There is, overall, an epic structure in Pessoa's faux-epic pretension of abandoning a biographical life in favor of an ennobling artistic project devoted in its totality to an aesthetic ideal of multiple, universal authorship.⁵⁶

Pessoa was, finally, aware of the impossibility of reproducing classical literature in a modernist moment in any guise beyond that of aesthetic

55 Unpublished translation by Ben Norwood.

56 In his pioneering critical concept of diversity and unity, the critic Jacinto do Prado Coelho defined a general purpose and presence of classicism in Pessoa's works, as they were known at the time: "Clássico pela constância e universalidade dos temas, pela severa redução do real ao não-real, que é a realidade que fica, Pessoa é-o igualmente pela sobriedade translúcida, pela facilidade aparente, pela discrição dos sentimentos mentalizados ou já de raiz intelectual, de qualquer modo serenados, clarificados, contidos [...] O classicismo de Reis, além deste sentido amplo, tem um sentido histórico-literário mais estrito: consiste no tratamento de temas típicos da literatura greco-latina, alimentada por conceitos de vida pagãos e que Reis se apropriou, e ainda no recurso a processos versificatórios e linguísticos que evocam a poesia horaciana ou a poesia neoclássica românica. Logo, enquanto o *personagem* ortónimo tende a subtrair-se às cadeias temporais, Reis faz-nos recuar a uma época ou épocas determinadas, e em consequência o seu estilo é intencionalmente antigo, anacrónico, artificial." Coelho (1973), 145.

appropriation and imitation. Prado Coelho considered him a classicist in the constancy and universality of his themes and his intellectual sobriety.⁵⁷ If Caeiro is the personification of a spontaneous and instinctual Neopaganism, Reis is consciously the author of an anachronistic and artificial imitation of a classical idea, witnessing its own extinction by way of esthetic reenactment. It could be said that Fernando Pessoa reconstructed and reenacted the classical voyage through multiple authorship spread throughout Western literature. His multiple literary universe was one of pseudo-epic proportions. Sena once called Pessoa “the man who never was,” referring to the erasure of his psychic self, which he replaced with a dramatic scenario for the non-self as art through a cast of heteronyms, which replaced and universalized his existence as a writer.⁵⁸ Pessoa found in Hellenism and classical philosophy a foundation for a new modern age, for which it was both the voice of a distant esthetic ideal and the call to return to a point of origin.

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“Ulysses’ Island”: *Nóstos* as Exile in Salvatore Quasimodo’s Poetry

Ernesto Livorni*

The Thirties saw the publication of the most representative collections of Hermetic poetry: during this period, Alfonso Gatto published his first two collections (*Isola* in 1932 and *Morto ai paesi* in 1937); Giuseppe Ungaretti refined his fragmented poetics in the two editions of *Sentimento del Tempo* in 1933 and 1936; and we could also take into consideration the publication of Corrado Pavolini’s *Patria d’acque* in 1933. But it is Salvatore Quasimodo’s poetic creation that opens and closes this decade of poetry. His first three collections (*Acque e terre* in 1930, *Oboe sommerso* in 1932, and *Erato e Apollion* in 1936) punctuate the development of Italian hermetic poetry, which would never be the same after Quasimodo’s triptych and his peers’ collections: simply consider *La Terra Promessa*, by Giuseppe Ungaretti, and *Nuove poesie* (1936–1942), by Quasimodo himself, for an immediate confirmation of this statement.¹

Prevalent in Italy between the two World Wars, Hermeticism reacted to the symbolist decadence of Gabriele D’Annunzio’s poetry (along with Giovanni Pascoli, the most important poet in fin-de-siècle Italy) and to the avant-garde of Futurism. Hermeticism distinguished itself by its careful attention to the poetic word, often relying on short and apparently cryptic poems, hence the definition of Hermeticism that the literary critic Francesco Flora first elaborated in his book *La poesia ermetica* in 1936. The importance of the precision of the word was the legacy that Symbolism left to Hermeticism, whereas literary critics sometimes interpreted the cryptic poetic expression as a political rebellion to Fascism. However, there were also those literary critics, supported by the critical writings of some of the poets, who emphasized the mystery of

* This article was translated from the Italian by Isabella Maria Livorni.

1 Furthermore, one cannot exclude Umberto Saba from this brief list of hermetic poetry – especially his collection *Parole* (1934) that includes, not coincidentally, a composition entitled “Ulisse”. A second composition with the same title appears years later in *Mediterranée* (1946). Both collections can be found in Saba (1988). Quasimodo’s collections are published in Quasimodo (1971). It must be noted that some critics do not agree on Quasimodo’s hermeticism, see, for instance Tedesco (1959), 23 and Bo (1969), 404–5.

the poetic expression, which in extreme cases aimed at a mystical sense of the poetic text.

The *topos* of *nóstos*, and in particular Ulysses' *nóstos*, is so prevalent in hermetic poetry that its presence cannot only be considered influential on a narrative and thematic level, but it also involves and truly supports the central principles of this poetry. The hermeticist poetics of the word must pay attention to certain Ulyssean myths, like that of the Sirens, which is a key element in the modernist elaboration of Ulysses, especially because of its implications with regards to *phonè*.² Furthermore, *nóstos* implies a *terminus ad quem* of circumnavigation: in Homer's epic poem, Ulysses' destination is the long-desired island of Ithaca, but we must also consider the fact that he must arrive, visit and finally leave many other islands before reaching his final destination. Therefore, there are two recurring elements in Odysseus' journey: the island and the shipwreck. In fact, the hero is introduced for the first time after the shipwreck that crashes him into the shore of the island of Ogygia. The episodes that follow alternate between shipwrecks and landings on various islands: a shipwreck and then the landing on Scheria (v, 282–493); the episode on the Cyclops' island (ix, 105–566); the floating island of Aeolia (x, 1–79); Circes' island (x, 133–574); the Sirens' island (xii, 142–200); and the island of Trinacria (xii, 260–402).³

The hermetic poets' interest in the metaphor of the island – a metaphor that breathes the same salty air of the metaphors of the sea journey and of the shipwreck – suggests a strong affinity between that image and the open nature of the fragment, which is the most emblematic poetic form the hermetic poets employed. The fragment appears to be the enlightening and often short expression of a longer and more complex discourse, which remains unsaid, but contained in its entirety in the fragment itself. One thinks of Ungaretti's first collections, which by no chance oscillates between the two titles *Il Porto Sepolto* (1916) and *Allegria di Naufragi* (1919), and the lack of punctuation at the end of each poem, in the style Guillaume Apollinaire adopted in his *Calligrammes*. The intention behind the lack of punctuation is to return the

2 Please see Ungaretti's "Sirene" and "L'Isola," in *Sentimento del tempo*, found in Ungaretti (1969), 109, 114. Regarding the island metaphor, please see Valentini (1970); for a discussion on Ungaretti's composition "L'Isola," please see Leo Spitzer's annotations in Ungaretti (1960) of *Taccuino del vecchio*, with statements from foreign friends of the poet; Friedrich (1983), 190–2 and Lonardi (1980), 83–6. For more on the poetic implications of lexical and semantic decisions in Quasimodo's poetry, please see Salina-Borello (1971a) and Genot (1969).

3 When Quasimodo published his translations *Dall'Odissea* (1951), he included the descriptions of Calypso's island and of the Island of the Sun, and the episode on Nausicaa.

poetic word to the blank space of the page, to silence, as though that space on the page, that silence were the equivalent of the open sea to the ship. The island, in short, resembles a sequence or a segment of isolated and, of course, fragmented words that interrupt the sea of silence surrounding the poet's voice. The first collection of Ungaretti's poetry is already a perfect example of this symbiosis between the poetic form and its landscape: the absence of punctuation at the end of the compositions in *Allegria* serves as a necessary link between text and page, as if those words are able to flow forth in that white, in that plenty. The choice of poetics of the word signals the obsessive intention of both Ungaretti and Quasimodo. The very isolation of the word (like in "Commiato" by Ungaretti: "Quando trovo / in questo mio silenzio / una parola / scavata è nella mia vita / come un abisso") becomes the reflexive operation of Saba's "Parole" ("Parole, / dove il cuore dell'uomo si specchiava / - nudo e sorpreso - alle origini") and incarnates the laceration of Quasimodo's poetic manner, as "Parola" announces: "Tu ridi che per sillabe mi scarno."⁴

At the beginning of his evocatively titled essay "Poetica" (1950) Quasimodo writes: "La parola isola, o la Sicilia, s'identificano nell'estremo tentativo di accordi col mondo esterno e con la probabile sintassi lirica."⁵ His identification of his birthplace, Sicily, with the concept of the word "island" itself (an identification that is, in turn, amplified by echoes of Leopardi within the same

4 Ungaretti's composition is from Ungaretti (1969), 58; Saba's is in the collection *Parole*, found in Saba (1988), 431; Quasimodo's is from *Oboe sommerso*, in Quasimodo (1971), 45. These compositions call to mind the following collections of poetry: Ceccardi, C. R. *Sillabe e ombre, Il libro dei frammenti* (1895; found in *Tutte le poesie*, Carrara: Apua, 1969); Giovanni Boine, *Frantumi* (1918; found in *Il peccato e le altre opere*, Ritratto di Giovanni Boine di Giancarlo Vigorelli, Parma: Guanda, 1971); Clemente Rebora, *Frammenti lirici* (1913; found in *Tutte le poesie*, edited by Gianni Mussini and Vanni Scheiwiller, preface by Eugenio Montale, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1979); in addition to, naturally, compositions by Gabriele D'Annunzio such as "La parola," from the Epilogue of *Poema paradisiaco* (1891–1892; found in *Versi d'amore e di gloria*, edition overseen by Luciano Anceschi, edited by Annamaria Andreoli and Niva Lorenzini, introduction by Luciano Anceschi, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1982, vol. 1, 700).

5 Written in 1950, it can be found in Quasimodo (1971), 277–9. It is equally important to keep in mind the following statements, written earlier (1946), in "Poesia contemporanea" that were clearly inspired by T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent:" "[...] 'parola' ha per me, ha sempre avuto, significato anche di epica, di drammatica. [...] Ogni poeta [...] si riconosce non soltanto dalla sua voce ritmica o interna ma soprattutto dal suo linguaggio, da quel particolare vocabolario e da quella sintassi che ne denunciano la 'personalità' attraverso una determinazione spirituale." Quasimodo (1971), 263–72.

paragraph, with the statement that “La mia siepe è la Sicilia”)⁶ further underscores the island’s undeniable relationship with the lyric search. In *Oboe sommerso*, in fact, Quasimodo refers to “accordi col mondo esterno” adding more explicitly: “Anch’io non ho cercato lontano il mio canto, e il mio paesaggio non è mitologico o parnassiano.” In addition to this essay, one could also point out the reference to the sea voyage in “Ulisse al suo sbarco nella terra dei Ciclopi,” found in “Muri siciliani,” along with other references in articles about Sicily, the island.⁷ Quasimodo’s specific references to the Greek hero are probably the strongest link between the image of the island and the theme of exile.⁸

Quasimodo’s emphasis on solitude is a typical trait of hermeticism. The poetic word, echoing in the poet’s voice, reflects the existential pain that opens the definitive arrangement that Quasimodo gave to his collections of poetry: “Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra / trafitto da un raggio di sole: ed è subito sera.” Starting with his first collection, *Acque e terre* (a title that evidently suggests an island landscape), the image of the island corresponds with the poet’s

6 The entire sentence is relevant: “[...] Ma poi: quale poeta non ha posto la sua siepe come confine del mondo, come limite dove il suo sguardo arriva più distintamente? La mia siepe è la Sicilia; una siepe che chiude antichissime civiltà e necropoli e latomie e telamoni spezzati sull'erba e cave di salgemma e zolfare e donne in pianto da secoli per i figli uccisi, e furori contenuti o scatenati, banditi per amore o per giustizia.” Please see Macrí (1938); Macrí (1941), and Macrí (1986), which notes how suggestive the word ‘isola’ is (301). Furthermore, please see Zagarrio (1969), 13–14, who points out the role of the poet as a strange figure of a migrant and exile, even when he still lives on the island. Zagarrio supports his statement with the first verses of two compositions (“Spazio” and “Si china il giorno”) that open, respectively, with “un preciso senso del limite” and with “la coscienza del limite” (21). Please see also Petrocchi (1961).

7 Published in *Pirelli*, October 1951; found in Quasimodo (1977), 23–4: the essay is also important because, as Finzi mentions, it is the foundation of a later work, “Nell’isola,” (14) in *Dare e avere* (in the first draft the title was “Muratore siciliano,” replacing the earlier “Il costruttore anonimo;” please see Quasimodo (1971), 935–8. For other references to the island and to Ulysses, please see “Introduzione alla Sicilia,” “Invito alle isole” and “Amalfi,” in Quasimodo (1971), 25–7, 33–5, 37–9.

8 In the preface of the anthology of *Poesia italiana del dopoguerra* that he edited, Quasimodo writes: “[...] Sono stati in esilio questi poeti, ma ora ritornano a precisare la loro separazione da una cultura matura, carica di dogmi spezzati. Parlando di critica, bisogna chiarire, mi riferisco [...] contemporaneamente a due atteggiamenti del pensiero: alla critica formalista con sottofondi esistenziali, e alla critica che in certo senso si potrebbe definire marxista.” Quasimodo (1960), 37–45. In other words, poetry written under fascism was a poetry of exile that can only find its way home after the Second World War. Please see Salvatore Pugliatti, “‘Esilio’ e ‘ritorni’ nella poesia di Quasimodo,” originally published in 1965, but reproduced in Pugliatti (1974), and Tedesco (1977), 3–28.

elegiac aspirations and emerges as the natural narration of the poet's song. Simply consider the first verses of "Vento a Tindari:"⁹

Tindari, mite ti so
fra larghi colli pensile sull'acque
dell'isole dolci del dio,
oggi m'assali
e ti chini in cuore.

Due to its hanging quality ("pensile"), Tindari appears as an island suspended among the islands, thanks to a reflective, specular image that also occurs in other poems in this collection: "Specchio" (p. 27), for instance. Even more important, in any case, is the fact that the distance from the island signifies, first of all, a shipwreck, against which the only possible defense is, once again, song ("A te ignota è la terra / ove ogni giorno affondo / e segrete sillabe nutro").¹⁰ Furthermore, the distance is a result of being conscious of a condition of exile that disrupts the harmonious foundations of a relationship with the outside world ("Aspro è l'esilio, / e la ricerca che chiudevo in te / d'armonia oggi si

9 For one of the most important readings of this poem, please see Salvatore Pugliatti's "Interpretare la poesia" (in *Solaria*, Florence, a.vii, n. 1, January, 1932; found in Pugliatti (1975); the poet's friend maintains that the apostrophe shifts from Tindari to a woman). Tedesco (1970), 213–36, on the other hand, maintains that the apostrophe is directed at Tindari.

10 Quasimodo's article "D'Annunzio e noi" (written in 1939; Quasimodo (1960), 192–231) is significant in this way:

"Noi gli [a D'Annunzio] fummo avversari non per inerzia o carenza d'amore, ma per sostanza della nostra natura impegnata nel canto; e per essa cercheremo di rendere ragione della resistenza opposta a una poetica della parola in senso qualitativo, cioè lessicale, durante la ricerca di un nostro probabile strumento espressivo."

[...]

"La poetica che noi abbiamo perseguito è orientata verso i valori di 'quantità' della parola assoluta, e del sentimento di essa. La nostra prova sulla parola fu in antitesi con quella dannunziana; non si limitò a un accertamento di numero, ma fece resistenza e ottenne la misura del tempo che impiega la voce a pronunciare una struttura organica di consonanti e di vocali: un superamento della percezione sillabica. Così la gelosa approssimazione al modulo di quantità ci avviò a una metrica non prestabilita, al riconoscimento della voce poetica. Diciamo voce e ci riferiamo alla durata della sua effusione e anche al ricorso della interna sua cadenza nel periodo della strofe. Una valutazione delle corrispondenze quantitative poteva imitare la natura della rima, ci allontanava dal modo consueto di specchiare 'i suoni'."

See also De Stefano (1986).

muta / in ansia precoce di morire").¹¹ Although there is no explicit mention of Ulysses, the hero comes to mind when we consider that the god in question is Eolus, the god of the winds that push Odysseus toward Scylla and Charybdis.¹² The very process of "la scarnificazione e l'isolamento della parola" aims toward a communion of subject and *lógos* that is only possible to the extent that the word, having become the flesh of the poetic voice, also takes on the solitude of that voice and emerges on the white of the page in complete and luminous isolation.¹³

These themes return in *Oboe sommerso* and they contribute to making the connection between island and song inextricable, once again thanks to the mediation of the total consciousness of exile experienced by the subject. It is impossible not to pick up on the subtle thematic threads that run through the first eight compositions, creating an initial sequence that is truly a cycle.¹⁴ The theme of the island is as constant and obsessive as the theme of song: while the latter returns rhythmically in compositions like "Oboe sommerso," "Nascita del canto," and "Parola," the former's presence is mainly felt in the central compositions. The theme of the island is introduced with "Isola mattutina" in the last verses of "Leucalyptus," and it becomes the focal point of the poem dedicated to Sicily ("Alla mia terra") and of "Nascita del canto," as well, where the islands are metaphors for light ("Giaccio su fiumi colmi / dove son isole / specchi d'ombre e d'astri"), and "Nell'antica luce delle maree." Furthermore, in "Riposo dell'erba" the evocation of the island is hidden, in a stylistic and probably subconscious device, in anagrammatic and hippogrammatic forms: "aeree zone di SOLi, / rISALgOno abissi: [...] / da SEcOLI L'erba rIpOSA / IL SuO cuore con me."¹⁵

11 Regarding this, please see Teresa Ferri's stylistic observations in "La poesia di Salvatore Quasimodo dalla sinestesia all'ossimoro, ovvero dal mito all'armonia della dissonanza" in Ferri (1985).

12 Please see Quasimodo's letter to Pugliatti, written on 18 August 1931, found in Quasimodo and Pugliatti (1988), 35.

13 Tondo (1976), 19.

14 In the first edition of *Oboe sommerso* the poems considered here were redistributed; they appeared in a different order and, sometimes, with a different title. Please see Quasimodo (1971), LXXV–LXXVI.

15 These poems are all, respectively, in Quasimodo (1971), 40, 41, 42, 44, 43. Salina-Borello writes: "Il ritorno all'isola viene quindi configurandosi come un viaggio in un aldilà posto fuori del tempo, alla ricerca del se stesso perduto, di una mitica immagine della propria infanzia." Salina-Borello (1971b), 113–125. See also Salibra (1985), 15–83. Another example of evocation through the use of a hypogram is the use of the adjective "pensile" in "Vento a Tindari," which makes way both semantically and phonetically for the mention of the

These psychic elements contained in Quasimodo's language give birth to the winding poetic devices of the poem "Parola," in which the literary device of prosopopoeia is twisted in a peculiar way: the Word ("parola") itself is represented as Woman (more specifically, as the goddess Venus, as she has been transmitted in the mythological, literary and figurative traditions) who changes constantly in her eternal beauty.¹⁶ Certain semantic hints link this poem to "Vento a Tindari," specifically those found in the second stanza, in which "In te tutta smarrita / alza bellezza i seni, / [...] / e ridiscende in armonia di forme" suggests the same movement, also beginning in the second stanza ("Salgo vertici aerei precepizi") in "Vento a Tindari," from *Acque e terre*.¹⁷ However, in "Parola" the subject's sudden movement is experienced as a calmer and more gentle caress that models the figure of the other ("s'incava ai lombi e in soave moto / s'allarga per il pube timoroso"),¹⁸ as if the aesthetic perception of "Parola," which adheres to the same sensorial and sensual knowledge as that found in "Vento a Tindari" ("Ti so"), must be viewed through the modeling of the word's body in order to be completely understood. In the meantime, the image of this figure takes on certain essential characteristics of the island's appearance:¹⁹ from the "azzurra siepe / a me d'intorno" to the ornamental "dieci conchiglie," the figure of the island becomes intertwined with that of the woman and that of the word.²⁰ And yet, the final stage of understanding is halted dramatically in the last two verses ("Ma se ti prendo, ecco: / parola tu

"isole dolci del dio" in the following verse. For a discussion of this technique in hermetic poetry, albeit concentrating on Ungaretti and Montale, please see Sasso (1982), in particular the analysis of "L'isola" by Ungaretti (144–62).

- 16 The scholar responsible for the most persistent interpretative definitions of Quasimodo's poetry is Macrí (1986), 279–313, but see also 19–114 and especially the section on "L'archetipo fonico e la commutazione sillabica di 'Apollion'" (72–77).
- 17 Please see Paparelli (1975). In the first edition of *Acque e terre* the last verses of "Vento a Tindari" made use of simpler syntax: "e io fingo timore | a chi non sa del vento | che m'ha cercato l'anima" (note the substitution of the final noun, whose openly spiritual reference later becomes superfluous, with the more subtle sense of interior depth through the insertion of the adjective that denotes the wind itself).
- 18 It would be helpful to consider a number of letters that Quasimodo wrote to Maria Cumani. Quasimodo (1973) 69–70 and the letters written on 28 January 1937 (69–70) and on 17 July 1938 (119).
- 19 Tondo (1976), 38. See also 171, n. 8, for a contrast between "Parola" and "Imitazione della gioia".
- 20 Without entering into a complete discussion on the text's anagrammatic function, it is worthwhile to point out the hypograms in the first verse ("Tu ridi che per SILLAbE mi scarno") and at the beginning of the second stanza ("TI SO"). One should also consider the similarities of this poem and "Sillabe Erato": "A te piega il cuore in solitudine, | esilio

pure mi sei e tristezza"). This apprehension leads to an emotional flattening of poetic knowledge, which can only be escaped in its glints of evocation ("ecco") and in the vagueness of its referentiality ("pure").

The presence of the island theme is so obsessive that even the subject, when it is evoked, is put aside, as if the objective were so overwhelming that it would require all of the poet's effort to address. In a way, the poems in the *Oboe sommerso* cycle form a continuation of *Acque e terre*. Two of them in particular, "Alla mia terra" and "Riposo dell'erba," recall the situation examined in "Vento a Tindari," so that in "Alla mia terra" the evocation of the native land ("disancorata") is contrasted with the present awakening ("Io qui infermo mi desto / d'altra terra amaro / e della pietà mutevole del canto / che amore mi germina / d'uomini e di morte"); while the opening verses of "Riposo dell'erba" ("Deriva di luce; labili vortici, / aeree zone di soli, / risalgono abissi") are an obvious rewriting of an earlier image in "Vento a Tindari" ("Salgo vertici aerei precipizi").²¹

Furthermore, a comparison of "Alla mia terra" and "Terra" (p. 17), a poem that had already been published in *Acque e terre*, immediately reveals, starting from their titles, a movement toward the personalization of this subject, not only because of the inclusion of the possessive adjective, but also because of its dedicatory tone.²² It isn't pure coincidence that the vocative "mia terra" returns in another poem in *Oboe sommerso*, "Isola" (p. 60):

Ma se torno a tue rive
e dolce voce al canto
chiama da strada timorosa

d'oscuri sensi | [...] || Semicerchi d'aria ti splendono | sul volto; ecco m'appari | [...] || Per averti ti perdo, | e non mi dolgo."

- 21 Please see the letter Quasimodo wrote to Maria Cumani on 12 November 1937. Quasimodo (1973), 101: "Se potessimo ora raffigurare in un diagramma (a te piace tale specchio geometrico) le tue ascese e le tue discese verso la chiarezza, (diremo amore?) quanti vertici si troverebbero sulla stessa linea? E il più alto lo troveremmo ora, temporalmente? Certo, ora, cuore mio: ma quanti abissi per quest'altezza!" The verse, in any case, is reminiscent of Ungaretti's "Cresima" ("Mi lancio nei precipizi"): this is one of Ungaretti's first poems, among those published in *Lacerba* in 1915, which De Robertis proclaims indebted to Palazzeschi. Ungaretti (1969), 405. For a reading of "Alla mia terra," please see Picchione and Picchione (1980) and Musarra (1986).
- 22 Please see Macrí (1986), 51–6. Tondo points out "l'avvio di sapore ungarettiano," contrasting it with the poem that precedes it, "Acquamorta," "di chiara derivazione montaliana." Tondo (1976), 21–2. The verse "In te mi getto" returns in "Seme" ("che quando Tu voglia | in seme mi getti | già stanco del peso che dorme"), creating a suggestive link between "Alla mia terra," "Isola" and "Seme," with interesting implications for the poet's psychic order.

non so se infanzia o amore,
 ansia d'altri cieli mi volge,
 e mi nascondo nelle perdute cose.

This poem is in a way the climactic moment of Quasimodo's poetry, according to the perspective that has been offered in this article until now, since it marks a personal variation on the desire of the Ulyssian hero for new adventures ("ansia d'altri cieli mi volge") after his return home, according to the centrifugal model Dante offered in *Inferno* xxvi. It is the first step toward a complete assimilation of the myth through a specific and detailed reading of Quasimodo's retelling of the epic.

In fact, the identification of the subject and the island is attested to in poems like "Seme" ("Alberi d'ombre, / isole naufragano in vasti acquari / inferma notte, sulla terra che nasce") and "Verde deriva"²³ ("verde deriva d'isole, / approdi di velieri, / la ciurma che seguiva mari e nuvole / in cantilena di remi e di cordami / mi lasciava la preda"), in which the subject's drifting becomes the distinctive sign not just of the "isole" but also of the elegiac song given to the "remi" and the "cordami" of the "velieri." This thematic imaginary points to the key motive of *nóstos*. Below, we will examine its appearances in various poems of *Nuove poesie*.

In the poetic world of *Erato e Apòllion*, the aforementioned metaphoric group is often associated with a type of imaginary that escapes any kind of precise deciphering, that is, the birth of the earth that already appears, as noted above, in "Seme" returns in "Sardegna" (another island!), and especially in "Isola di Ulisse."²⁴ In the first of these compositions, "Sardegna," after the dawn has allowed a vision of earth to emerge, these verses follow:

Mi trovo di stessa nascita;
 e l'isolano antico,
 ecco, ricerca il solo occhio
 sulla sua fronte, infulminato,
 e il braccio prova
 nel lancio delle rupi maestro.

23 Please see "Visibile, invisibile," in *La terra impareggiabile*, found in Quasimodo (1971), 197.

24 Tondo (1976), 42 draws comparisons between poems like "Insonnia," "Cavalli di luna e di vulcani" and "Latomie" and verses found in "Isola di Ulisse." See also 116–8, on the common origin of "Che lunga notte" and "Al di là delle onde delle colline," the two poems that open the section entitled "Dalla Sicilia" in *Il falso e vero verde* and that, originally, had been entitled "Ballata del 20 agosto 1954." "Isola di Ulisse" and "Sardegna" can be found in Quasimodo (1971), 88, 90.

Once again, the relationship between subject and island is very intimate and vital, but in this example it is intertwined with an obvious reference to a specific episode in the myth of Ulysses: that of Polyphemus, who appears in the figure of the "isolano antico."²⁵ The hero's journey acquires a more precise characterization in the verses that follow, when the possibility of the subject's redemption is entrusted to the island, the place of memory ("La pietà m'ha perduto; / e qui ritrovo il segno / che allo squallido esilio / s'esprime amoroso; / nei nomi di memoria").

These suggestions in "Isola di Ulisse" share at least three characteristics with "Sardegna" and with "Nascita del canto:" birth, celestial qualities, and ephemerality:

Ferma è l'antica voce.
Odo risonanze effimere,
oblio di piena notte
nell'acqua stellata.

Dal fuoco celeste
nasce l'isola di Ulisse.
Fiumi lenti portano alberi e cieli
nel rombo di rive lunari.

Le api, amata, ci recano l'oro:
tempo delle mutazioni, segreto.

The "ancient song," ("antica voce") of the Sirens (it is tempting to say) has faded forever and now it is only possible to hear "risonanze effimere."²⁶ This auditory references, in turn, echo Ungaretti's poetic vision in *Sentimento del tempo*.²⁷ Even more interesting is the image of the "fuoco celeste." After all, the defining

25 This mythological Cyclops returns in "Ai fratelli Cervi, alla loro Italia," in *Il falso e vero verde*: "Nella notte dolcissima Polifemo piange | qui ancora il suo occhio spento dal navigante | dell'isola lontana. E il ramo d'ulivo è sempre ardente." Quasimodo (1971), 186.

26 This is Quasimodo's version of *Odyssey* XII, 39–49: "E giungerai nel luogo dove stanno le Sirene | che attirano gli uomini. Chi s'avvicina ignaro | e ascolta il loro canto non vedrà più la casa, e i figli e la sposa non avranno la gioia del ritorno. | Le Sirene lo incantano con la limpida voce, | sedute in un prato con intorno un cumulo | fitto di guasti corpi d'uomini sulle cui ossa | la pelle si dissecca. Tu passa oltre | e chiudi le orecchie ai compagni con molle cera | di soave miele, perché alcuno non le possa udire."

27 The verse "nel rombo di rive lunari" is reminiscent of the first verses of "Eco" and of "Caino" in *Sentimento del Tempo*. Furthermore, the final metaphor in "Sardegna" ("Deserto effimero") echoes themes held dear in Ungaretti's poetry: please see Ramat (1976), 276–85.

gesture of this poem (the birth) is entrusted to the “fuoco celeste,” which at first glance appears to be a phenomenon combining dawn over the sea and a volcanic eruption. But the semantic ambiguity of this reference is enriched by the significance of the attribute “celeste,” as in “il tuo grembo celeste” in “Nascita del canto” and “l’acqua celeste” in “Sardegna.”²⁸ In fact, the fire can be “celeste” because that is a divine attribute, just like the sun’s light is the symbol of divinity *par excellence*. Fire can also be divine, perhaps in a less emphatic understanding of its connotations, to the extent that it is the product of Vulcan’s forge that plunges upward after having been launched into the sky, as the third verse of the above-cited stanza suggests. Finally, fire can be “celeste” due to the natural colors that occur during combustion and because of the way it rises upward toward the sky. In this sense, the laziness, the lethargy of the hot magma finds expression in those “fiumi lenti,” another liquid image that moves from a high plane to a lower one, a descent that is an unnatural movement for fire. The hero of the title does not seem to play any role in this poem; and yet, the birth of his island “Dal fuoco celeste” allows the identification of Ithaca with Sicily, just as it allows that of Ulysses with the exiled subject.²⁹ This identification receives a contorted confirmation in the last two verses and in the image of the bees, which repeats the preceding poem in this collection, “Sovente una riviera”:³⁰

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- 28 See also “Nell’isola,” in *Dare e avere*, found in Quasimodo (1971), 252–253: “È marzo a spaccati celesti, | l’uomo esce dal suo letto di frasche | e va in cerca di pietra e di calcina.” The use of this attribute keeps its Latin etymology alive, and Quasimodo found many examples of this in Foscolo’s work: see the many occurrences in *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, which are indeed too many to quote them here, *Dei Sepolcri* and *Le Grazie*. Please see Macrí (1980) 13–15, 89–96 and D’Episcopo (1986), 425–43.
- 29 On this subject, we must consider certain letters that Quasimodo wrote to Maria Cumani, starting with the first one in *Lettere d’amore a Maria Cumani*, written on 27 June 1936. Quasimodo (1973), 17. Regarding the image of the “fuoco celeste,” three other letters are equally relevant, like the letters written on 24 July 1936 (25), on 3 August 1936 (30–1), on 16 November 1937 (102), on 13 August 1938 (128). With regards to the concept of “tempo delle mutazioni,” please see the letter written on 22 January 1937 (68–9). Please see the letters written on 10 and 13 July 1937 (78–82), in which Quasimodo includes two versions of his Sappho translation: “A me pare uguale agli dei.” Quasimodo (1971), 303. See also Baroni (2002), 5–15.
- 30 On the image of bees and honey, please see “Scritto forse su una tomba” and “Il tuo piede silenzioso,” in *Giorno dopo giorno*, found in Quasimodo (1971), 137, 145. See also the letter written to Maria Cumani on 28 September 1936 in Quasimodo (1973), 49. The letter written on 19 July 1937 (83–5), which includes certain verses from Quasimodo’s translation of Sappho, “Tramontata è la luna” (in Quasimodo (1971), 307), and which ends with the following sentence: “Mio cuore, io penso a quel caldo, dorato colore che si stende sulle

Sovente una riviera
raggia d'astri solenni,
bugni di zolfo sul mio capo
dondolano.

Tempo d'api: e il miele
è nella mia gola
fresca di suono ancora.
Un corvo, di meriggio gira
su arenarie bige.

Arie dilette: cui quiete di sole
insegna morte, e notte
parole di sabbia,

di patria perduta.

While the last verse, in its visual representation of isolation, introduces the theme of "Isola di Ulisse," the bee image is borrowed from a fragment of Sappho that Quasimodo translates as "Tramontata è la luna."³¹ The poet is thus contaminating his poem with the compositions of classical poets, borrowing a specific thematic imaginary and inserting it into a very personal context.

tue membra al fresco mare della Liguria, penso al miele della tua spalla, alla tua *estesa e profonda* giovinezza che è mia;" the letters written on 27 September 1937 (97–9) and from Milan on 19 July 1938 (120–1).

- 31 Si veda "Traduzione dai classici," in Quasimodo (1960), 73: "E la prima [ad essere tradotta] fu Saffo, l'isolana a cui Omero aveva data la sua cadenza più alta, il grido più desolato della sua umana e provvisoria giornata. Non aggiunti mai un aggettivo negli spazi bianchi dei suoi frammenti [...], mai una 'cosa' che non fosse da lei accennata, mai una pausa che non fosse nella sua segreta sillabazione." Among the critics that should be consulted with regards to the bee and honey images are: Salibra (1985), 36–45 and Marchi (1975), 150–2. Returning to Quasimodo, it seems that he had fully intuited the value of the honey-bee myth, the magical function of this food, when he wrote the verses: "Le api, amata, ci recano l'oro: | tempo delle mutazioni, segreto." Keeping in mind what was said above, it seems rather clear, beyond any interpretative ambiguity, that with "tempo delle mutazioni, segreto," the poet wishes to express the secret and reserved dynamic of the conjugal relationship and the exact moment in which honey (which here is loaded with certain connotations by becoming "oro," as well) fulfills the requested and awaited response, byproduct of generation ("mutazioni").

In fact, an entire sequence of poems in *Nuove poesie* is thematically based on this strategy, which creates a suggestive triptych around the image of the island, contrasting the image of the “alto veliero,” the type of ship already present in the above-cited poems from *Oboe sommerso*. The three-poem sequence opens with “L’alto veliero,” whose emblematic title links it to the following “Sulle rive del Lambro” (a poem in which the image of the “api secche di miele” returns) and “Sera nella valle del Màsino.”³² The ship, the protagonist of these poems, is a sophisticated version of the metonymic “legno” used by the Dantean Ulysses when he left Ithaca and Penelope. The adjective in “alto veliero” offers an initial hint to its Dantean quality, since that adjective is a descriptor frequently used by Ulysses from the moment in which he sets off “per l’alto mare aperto” (*Inferno* XXVI, 1. 100) until he finds himself “nell’alto passo” in front of a “montagna [...] / [...] alta tanto” (*Inferno* XXVI, 11. 132–134).³³ “Io voglio partire, voglio lasciare

32 The last two poems, along with “Elegos per la danzatrice Cumani,” “Nel giusto tempo mano,” “Delfica” and “Imitazione della gioia,” were written for Maria Cumani. However, the first version of “L’alto veliero,” entitled “Io misi la fronte alla luna,” was also recorded in a letter written to Maria Cumani on 3 March 1939 in Quasimodo (1973), 134, which Quasimodo introduces with the following passage: “Ho tradotto ancora due poesie di Saffo ed altre due le ho iniziate. Ma ieri sera ho scritto una mia poesia. E con queste parole oggi voglio parlarti. Tu capisci che è un “sogno,” uno di quei sogni che possano consolare il mondo. Ho rotto qua e là la metrica per lasciare la stesura originale; e l’ho rotta con le poetiche e con la tradizione.” Tondo (1976), 43, with regards to this poem, alludes to a significant shift in poetic genre. Tondo (1976), 174 also points out “la parola dantesca” in the verses “altri già affondavano nel fango, | avevano le mani, gli occhi disfatti, | urlavano misericordia e amore” in “Lamento per il Sud” and adds: “tutti e due i versi mi sembrano una singolare contaminazione di due luoghi danteschi, cioè degli episodi di Ciaccio e di Filippo Argenti, immersi nel fango.” See also Tondo (1976), 112 (“nell’Ode per Federico García Lorca’ [...] troviamo la contaminazione di due luoghi danteschi (tutti e due riguardanti Cacciaguida, v. *Par.* XV, 28, e XVII, 13), sia infine nel tema nerudiano della morte, così allusivamente insistito.”). The medieval poet was certainly present in Quasimodo’s poetry, starting in his very first poems: please see the verse “Si drizzan sullo stelo” in “L’aurora,” a poem that, according to Gioacchino Paparelli (1975), 28, was probably written in 1915, but which was published in *Humanitas* (Bari, 13 May 1917; found in Quasimodo (1971), 727. Quasimodo himself points to this poem as his “primo lavoro poetico” in a postcard to Lionello Fiumi on 17 October 1917). Paparelli harshly criticizes the verse: “Scolastica la citazione dantesca.” But see also Ciccarelli (1985) and Ciccarelli (1991).

33 Please see the letters in Quasimodo (1973), 57: (“Ma tu sai che io non temo il dolore: è un’arma così lucente che abitua alle devastazioni ma anche al ‘folle volo’ (ricordi l’Ulisse di Dante?)”), 64 (“gli eroi romantici amavano ancora la superficie, erano ancora troppo ‘legati’ per arrivare al *folle volo*. [...] Avrai il tuo fiore e il fiore avrà il suo miele”), 87–8 (the editor’s note states that “Il ricordo di quelle giornate riaffiorerà nella poesia (i primi 7 versi) ‘Sulle rive del Lambro’”: “Durano questi mali celesti nel nostro cuore umano: e chi ci guarirà dal ritmo? Chi ci dirà folli penserà di abbassarci, di mischiarsi ai volti anonimi

quest'isola":³⁴ this is the cry that the poetic voice directs toward the beloved, a desire founded on the exhaustion that is, once again, a kind of premonition of the destiny that awaits those who set out on the journey of Dante's Ulysses. Thus, the emotional statement of "Io sono stanco di tutte quest'ali che battono / a tempo di remo" is a manipulation of Ulysses' story ("dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo" *Inferno* XXVI, ll. 1–2). In conclusion, even Ulysses' shipwreck is described in the incredible final verses of this poem:

Allora mi misi lentamente a contare
i forti riflessi d'acqua marina
che l'aria mi portava sugli occhi
dal volume dell'alto veliero.

The key term is "volume," thanks to its rich semantic ambiguity:³⁵ its first, immediate effect is its capacity to present the "alto veliero" as massive, mixed with the overall sense of a liquid element, as if it wanted to submerge and drown the poetic voice with its "forti riflessi d'acqua marina." But the term "volume" also includes the optical allusion to "lume" (once again, reminiscent of Ulysses' counting of the moon cycles in *Inferno* XXVI, ll. 130–131: "Cinque volte raccesso e tante casso / lo lume era di sotto dalla luna"), an allusion that is continued by the "silenzio / del lume dei velieri" that opens the third poem in this sequence: "Sera nella valle del Mäsino."

In this composition, Quasimodo reaches another high level of conscious assertion of the Ulysses myth within the context of his personal poetic imaginary:

Non udrò fragore ancora del mare
lungo i lidi dell'infanzia omerica

'volgari' d'intelligenza. Ma noi siamo folli di 'noi'. Tu dicevi: "ecco, io sogno". E io, veramente, trattenevo A[renzano] pronta a partire come un veliero coi suoi pennoni alti, già via nel vento." Please see Quasimodo's essays "Dante" (1952) and "Discorso sulla poesia" (1953) in Quasimodo (1971), 281–291.

34 The best interpretation of these verses is Zagarrio (1969), 23–4.

35 The word "volume" can also refer to a bound book, a common medieval metaphor for the universe, as in *Paradiso* XXXIII, ll. 85–7 ("Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna, | legato con amore in un volume, | ciò che per l'universo si squaderna"), which appears rhymed with "lume" (l. 90: "[...] ciò ch'io dico è un semplice lume"), a key word in this final canto that occurs two more times (ll. 115–116: "Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza | de l'alto lume"; l. 128: "[...] come lume riflesso"). It must also be noted that at the end of Dante's journey, the same adjective used by Ulysses signals the end of the vision: "A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa" (l. 142: the phrase has also already appeared in *Purgatorio* XVII, l. 25).

il libeccio sull'isole
 funebre a luna meridiana,
 e donne urlare ai morti cantando
 dolcezze di giorni nuziali.

These verses appear to be a reply to the Ulysses myth elaborated by Romantic poet Ugo Foscolo in "A Zacinto." Quasimodo harps on the auditory, rather than tactile, quality of the imagined experience. Instead, Foscolo laments the impossibility to touch once more "le sacre sponde / ove il mio corpo fanciulletto giacque," an image in which subject and verb evoke the pervasive quality of a specifically physical sensation, before comparing Odysseus' "diverso esiglio" (1.9) to his own. This expression derives from *Aeneid* 111, 4: "diversa exsilia et desertas quaerere terras." By borrowing this image from Vergil, Foscolo combines the two journeys and exiles of Odysseus and Aeneas, both of which are different from his own: Foscolo, in fact, will have an "illacrimata sepoltura." Quasimodo, on the other hand, mutates the tactile references into an "auditory imagination," to quote T. S. Eliot, a poet who in these years becomes an important reference point for Quasimodo as well as for other hermetic poets.³⁶ Thus, Foscolo's peremptory negation is not only dissolved within Quasimodo's first verse, but it is also absorbed into the assonant movement of the hendecasyllabic verse: "Non udRò fRAGORE anCORA del MARE." In light of Foscolo's peculiar metrical and stylistic strategy, this verse acquires suggestive undertones once one considers the possible semantic disorder implicit in the two possibilities presented by the temporal adverb "ancora" in contrast to the noun "ancora." The use of the adverb seems, at first glance, more probable, since it flows rhythmically into the liquid nature of the two following verses ("lungo i lidi dell'infanzia omerica / il libeccio sull'isole"), as if Quasimodo wanted to substitute the complementary, rhyming images of "sacre sponde" and of the "onde / del greco mar." Still, the use of "ancora" as a noun would suggest, on the one hand, an immediate cause for the "fragore;" on the other hand, and perhaps more interestingly, it would cause a type of caesura in the hendecasyllable that seems to imitate that found in Foscolo, that is, the adjacent positions of the accents on a last syllable and a first syllable, respectively, of a verse's two hemistichs (as in "dorme lo spirto guerrier ch'entro mi rugge," a verse in which this effective metrical mastery is based on the /r/ sound).³⁷

36 In addition to Montale, one must remember Ungaretti and Luzi as well, among others.

37 Gigante (1975), 127–141 states that in the first verses of this poem "il poeta ci dà una dimensione anticlassicistica della poesia omerica, una misura antieroica del mondo epico, quasi

These poems from *Nuove poesie* are a good example of the reasons behind the choice of this collection's title:³⁸ since these poems inaugurate a new phase in Quasimodo's poetics "alla voce delle isole" (p. 197) in *La terra impareggiabile* (1955–1958), they absorb the myth that allows for the new paths taken on by this poetry, when both the poet's personal story and the collective history of Italy and of Europe required a rebirth that could remain coherent within this respected cultural tradition.

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- un'anticipazione del suo modo di scovare in Omero valori espressivi essenziali e di rinverdire il tono della narrazione epica" and adds that, in the context of this first verse (131, n. 9), "La frequenza della lettera *erre* dà un'idea moderna del mare lungirisonante."
- 38 There is a well-known debate on the meaning of an implicit turn in this collection: Stefanile (1943), 29–30, right after the publication of *Nuove poesie*, states that Quasimodo "assumendosi a sempre più interessato protagonista, è riuscito a superare il frammentario e l'episodico per giungere a una visione unitaria di sé stesso nel tempo" and concludes that "Le *Nuove Poesie* testimoniano progressivamente di quest'avvenuto processo". Zagarrìo (1969), 67–8 states that "Le *Nuove Poesie* e i *Lirici Greci* vanno intesi, appunto, come la conquista dello spazio (o limite) poetico, che il Quasimodo 'ermetico', così disponibile all'astratto e arbitrario mondo del *Tutto-Nulla*, deriva dal movimento memoriale o della lievitazione." He concludes that "i suoi esiti più decisivi si hanno [...] in particolare in quel figurativo straordinario o spazio di quantità dell' "Isola", che appare il loro motivo emergente, più in generale il motivo che precipita il più alto grado di universalità nella poesia quasimodiana." However, see also Zagarrìo (1969), 83: "E c'è naturalmente il problema della 'rottura' con l'ermetismo, da cui il poeta si sarebbe staccato (e qui si è incerti se al momento di *Giorno dopo giorno* o a quello di *La vita non è sogno*)." Regarding this last question, please see Tondo (1976), 27: "Le *Nuove poesie* [...] segnano una svolta nel cammino del poeta, il passaggio o, meglio, il ritorno al canto disteso, dopo il processo di scarnificazione portato agli estremi in *Oboe sommerso* e in *Erato e Apollion*." For Tondo (1976), 71, in *Nuove poesie* "Il mito dell'isola torna ad acquistare linee e colori più reali, in un ritmo evocativo che musicalmente si traduce in fresche figure, come il tempo nella danza della Cumani, ma che ha come dialettico contrappunto l'amarezza, l'ira, il dolore del presente." But see also the apparently different consideration that is also expressed in Tondo (1976), 89: "La 'rottura' è dunque da spostare più avanti: lo iato è evidente tra *Giorno dopo giorno* e *La vita non è sogno*, che, edito nel 1949, comprende appena nove poesie, scritte tra il '46 e il '48, cioè negli anni più tumultuosi e polemici dell'immediato dopoguerra, accompagnate dalla traduzione di alcuni episodi 'siciliani' delle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio." Here, Tondo agrees with the affirmations that are shared by Bo in "Sulle *Nuove Poesie* di Quasimodo" (in *La Ruota*, Roma, a. iv, n. 5, maggio 1943 published in Bo (1975) and Macrí (1938).

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Jean Cocteau, *Orphée*, and the Shock of the Old

David Hammerbeck

Modernist icon and artistic polymorph Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) and his œuvre have not aged particularly well in the modern, postmodern, and now post postmodern eras. Even during his lifetime, Cocteau received considerable critical scrutiny. Jean Boorsch, in his 1950 article “The Use of Myths in Cocteau’s Theatre,” stated that “there remains something limited, brittle and fleeting in his popularity that does not augur too well for his glory among posterity.”¹ Boorsch additionally criticized Cocteau’s “nervousness and instability, his childish need for admiration, [and] a kind of puerile desire to astonish.”² Fellow playwright Eugène Ionesco dismissed Cocteau’s dramatic output as “superficial and contrived [...] the theatrical tricks too obvious.”³ Cocteau’s close friend and frequent collaborator, albeit not a noted literary critic, Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, dismissed him as a “snobbish little pederast who did nothing all his life but steal from people.”⁴ In a series of essays in the Pompidou Center’s 2003–2004 retrospective devoted to Cocteau, Dominique Païni noted that “Son incomparable aisance et ses apperentes réussites l’ont rendu suspect. Suspect d’insuffisante rigueur, d’insuffisante profondeur, d’insuffisante morale, d’insuffisante économie, d’insuffisante pudeur. Insuffisante en tout” [his incomparable ease and his apparent successes render him suspect. Suspect of insufficient rigor, of insufficient profundity, of insufficient spirit, of insufficient economy, of insufficient modesty. All in all, insufficient.]⁵

Cocteau suffered derision from those whom he collaborated with, from critics, and fellow writers as well. According to many of them, his protean efforts in the arts only revealed him as a consummate amateur, adept in many métiers but a master of none, despite producing the seminal films *Le Sang d’un poète*,

1 Boorsch (1950), 75.

2 Boorsch (1950), 75.

3 Ionesco (1961), 22.

4 Quoted in Mulstein, A. “The Cut of Coco,” *The New York Review of Books*. <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/oct/09/cut-coco-chanel/?insrc=toc>>, accessed September 19, 2014.

5 Païni (2003b), 17. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

La Belle et la Bête and *Orphée*. They also ignore his theatrical triad of adaptations of Greek myths and/or plays, *Antigone*, *Orphée* and *La Machine Infernale* (his retelling of the myth of Oedipus) and other projects in the performing arts which included his participation, with Eric Satie and Pablo Picasso, in the Cubist ballet *Parade* and his collaboration with Igor Stravinsky which culminated in the oratorio *Cedipus Rex*. What about his more than considerable body of literary (novels, poems, essays, memoirs) and artistic works (paintings, sketches, prints, sculptures, murals) that were consistently in the forefront of the arts for many decades? Is this the output of an insufficient artist?

Cocteau's œuvre, to a certain extent, centered upon his adaptation and transformation of Greek myth. According to avant-garde iconoclast Jean Genet, the word Greek in French – grec – holds the key to understanding the man and his works:

Grec! La sèche élégance de ce mot, sa brièveté, sa cassure même, un peu abrupte, sont les qualités qui s'appliquent avec promptitude à Jean Cocteau. Le mot est déjà un précieux travail du découpage: ainsi désigne-t-il le poète dégagé, dépris d'une manière don't il gait voler les copeaux. Le poète – ou son œuvre mais donc lui – reste un curieux fragment bref, dur, étincelant, cocassement inachevé – comme le mot grec – et qui contient les vertus que je veux dénombrer. Surtout la luminosité. Un éclairage d'abord uniforme et cruel, montrant avec précision les détails d'un paysage apparemment sans mystère: c'est le classicisme hellénique.⁶

[Greek! The dry elegance of this word, its brevity, its rupture also, a little abrupt, are the qualities which apply with promptitude to Jean Cocteau. The word itself is a neat work of découpage; it shows the poet as disengaged, debased to the point where he will steal leftovers. The poet – or his works but mostly him – becomes a curious fragment, succinct, comically unfinished – like the word grec – which contains virtues which I wish to enumerate. Above all luminosity, an illumination above all else uniform and cruel, showing with detail a countryside without mystery: Hellenic classicism.]

For Genet, Cocteau's supposed deficiencies become virtues: his brevity, ego, shallowness and showmanship reveal not insufficiency but an acute eye and an artistic sensibility based in part on appraising the poetic possibilities of contradictions. Genet, in his own characteristically contorted literary analysis,

⁶ Nemer (2003), 25.

identifies an essential aspect of Cocteau: the shifting and fragmented identity of the artist, aligned with illuminating aspects of the Hellenic world.

In this chapter I examine how Cocteau utilizes the myth of Orpheus in the play *Orphée* (1926) and the film *Le Sang d'un poète* [*The Blood of a Poet*] (1930), primarily the former. I shall predominantly focus on Cocteau's imbrication of "self" with the character of Orpheus, and the possibility itself of constructing a stable subject. Cocteau in these two works displays a kind of Coctelian tautology; the artist in search of the artist in search of the artist, a matriushka of identities,⁷ never settling on one as each when removed reveals another, which in turn reveals another, ad infinitum, a process wherein the only continuity or constant identity is that of transformation, or transfiguration. Through this instability, or inability to fix identity, Cocteau as author and auteur conflates his identity with that of Orpheus (Orphée in French), descending to the other world or unconscious to retrieve or rediscover his exiled mate/other (Eurydice, or his creative side), only to have to delve into the deep again when the spring of creativity runs dry.

Cocteau and the Early 20th-Century Avant-Garde

Cocteau played a key role in the development of early-to-mid-20th-century modernism. A social and artistic celebrity who, though since eclipsed by many of his contemporaries, Cocteau's plays nonetheless remained popular through the 1950s and 1960s, with prominent productions in French, English and other languages by Peter Brook, The Living Theatre and other notable directors and companies. Nowadays, however, those interested in French Theatre between the wars are much more likely to direct their attention to practitioners and theorists such as Louis Jouvet or Antonin Artaud; French playwrights of that period, not just Cocteau but also Jean Anouilh and Jean Giradoux, now feel dated and somewhat insubstantial; critics bent on examining significant French and avant-garde films of that era are more likely to gravitate towards Luis Buñuel, Jean Vigo and others rather than towards Cocteau.⁸ Cocteau's

7 Matriushka are Russian dolls, painted wood or similar materials, which nest inside of each other.

8 Though Luis Buñuel was a Spanish national, and his film *Un Chien Andalou* was co-authored with Salvador Dalí, also a Spanish national, both *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Âge D'Or*, both considered masterpieces of Surrealist cinema, were produced, filmed and scripted entirely in France, where Buñuel lived during the early years of Franco's Fascist regime in Spain. Later Buñuel immigrated to Mexico, then returned to France in the 1960s.

contemporaries in the French avant-garde differed dramatically in the tenor and substance of their interests: Artaud devised his program for The Theatre of Cruelty, beginning around 1924 by drawing on metaphysical sources, and Elizabethan playwrights, while the Surrealist playwright Roger Vitrac penned *Les Mystères de l'amour* [*The Mysteries of Love*], (1927) and *Victor ou les enfants au pouvoir* [*Victor, or Power to the Children*], (1928), both of which reveled in the Surrealist's deification of anarchy and the unconscious. Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray helmed the Surrealist films *Anemic Cinéma* and *Emak-Bakia*, respectively (both 1926), and of course the legendary Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali films *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Âge d'Or*. While other Surrealists experimented with automatic writing, public performances aimed at shocking the bourgeoisie, and other revolutionary enterprises. At the same time, however, Cocteau countered these most avant-gardist and modernist projects by drawing upon the mythopoeic resources of the classical world in creating three plays during the interwar period: *Antigone* (1924); *Orphée* (1926) *La Machine Infernal* (1934); as well as the Stravinsky oratorio *Oedipus Rex* (1927).

Cocteau additionally drew upon the most accomplished talents of his time to flesh out the *mise en scène* in all three productions: *Antigone* featured scenery by Picasso, Chanel costumes and music by Arthur Honegger;⁹ Chanel again created the costumes for *Orphée*;¹⁰ Stravinsky composed the score for *Oedipus Rex* and Louis Jouvet directed *La Machine Infernal*.¹¹ He seemed afflicted by an incessant compulsion for attention, to surround himself with the artistic, social and gay elite of Paris, France and Europe; Cocteau “se balançait sur le public, sur la mort, sur le ridicule, sur le mauvais gout, sur l'inconvenance, sur le scandale, sans tomber” [balanced himself over the public, over death, over ridicule, over bad taste, over inconvenience, over scandal without falling].¹²

However it was the famous challenge issued to Cocteau by the impresario of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev – “astound me” – which perhaps still had the power to inspire Cocteau after several fallow years in the early- to mid-1920s – years, not coincidentally, following the death of his lover, rebellious acolyte

9 Cocteau (1961), 49.

10 Williams (2008), 132.

11 Williams (2008), 156. Stravinsky was familiar with Cocteau from pre-war Paris and the Ballets Russes' annual visits to the Théâtre du Châtelet with *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Petrushka* and other ballets. Stravinsky at that time (before World War II) regarded Cocteau as little more than a somewhat talented careerist, though this did not stop him from collaborating with Cocteau. Williams (2008), 50–1.

12 Paini (2003b), 18.

the writer Raymond Radiquet.¹³ Cocteau had a peripheral association with the Ballet Russes, with his involvement in *Le Dieu bleu* with Diaghilev, scene designer Leon Bakst, and dancers Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina in 1912, and then his second project with them in 1917, the cubist ballet *Parade*, with music by Satie, sets by Picasso, script by Guillaume Apollinaire, and choreography by Léonide Massine.

Cocteau sought the association of the avant-garde of Paris throughout his career, which is to say the avant-garde center of the world at that time, forming working and personal relations with some of the foremost figures of his time. Yet Cocteau intrepidly traced his own path, never shying away from controversy while mostly keeping his closest artistic associates at arm's length. His willingness to appear front and center, alone, meant, however, that he would bear the brunt of critics' alone. While Cocteau played a prominent role in the Parisian and world avant-garde from just before World War I until the 1950s, his frequent self promotion (perhaps not unrelated to his interest in fairground theatre with its barkers, charlatans, and sideshows), more than his art, guaranteed that his it was his public persona that predominated over his collaborators, or the productions.

Orphée

Orphée premiered on June 17, 1926, directed by Serge Pitoëff at the Théâtre des Arts. Cocteau, in the previous years had openly sparred with the Surrealists. Led by André Breton, who despised Cocteau for his openly elitist and politically conservative leanings, the Surrealists attended both *Antigone* and *Orphée*, solely for the purpose of disrupting performances, which they did with *Orphée* for fifty-one nights in a row. Cocteau's association with Parisian avant-garde circles had become more problematic following World War I. In 1920, in the second issue of Cocteau's journal *Le Coq*, following his departure from the Parisian Dadaists, he proclaimed that he was of "the extreme Right" and directed an "anti-Modern League."¹⁴ In the last issue of November 1920 – Cocteau biographer James S. Williams points out that his publisher had run out of funds – Radiquet advised poets to "strive to be banal," a clear riposte to Diaghilev's exhortation of eight years previous.¹⁵ However, Cocteau was not the only prominent modernist or

13 Diaghilev issued the challenge to the young author on the Place de la Concorde in 1912, not long after Cocteau's collaboration with the scene designer Léon Bakst on the Ballet Russes' *Le Dieu bleu*. Williams (2008), 49.

14 Williams (2008), 97.

15 Williams (2008), 97.

avant-gardist in Paris to run afoul of Breton, with Artaud also excommunicated from the group, kicked out of the Surrealists due to his work in the commercial cinema, appearing in Abel Gance's *Napoleon* and Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. The question must be posed vis-à-vis Cocteau and the myth of Orpheus, it can be frustrating to separate Cocteau and his work from his public persona: did the artist himself cause such furor, or was it the use of Greek mythology in modernist Paris, or these combination of these two factors, or something else altogether?

Perhaps the most common analysis of Cocteau's literary and artistic output centers upon the artist himself and his many manifestations, his self-preoccupation, and how his public and private personas form readily identifiable stages of his career, with rather clear and self-promoting public transformations between stages. Immediately prior to the composition of *Orphée*, Cocteau had come under the care and tutelage of Jacques Maritain, as Cocteau underwent treatment for opium addiction, at the same time suffering through a fallow artistic period. Relaxing at his villa in Villefranche-sur-Mer (adjacent to Nice), licking his psychic wounds inflicted by the Surrealists' attacks, Cocteau wrote to Maritain: "Les S. me/nous couvrent d'ordures et il n'y a plus à s'en inquiéter ni à croire que leurs paroles sont réglées par telle ou telle chose" [the Surrealists cover me/us with shit, and you can't worry or believe that it is caused by this or that].¹⁶ Having completely broken with the Surrealists, Cocteau sought spiritual and artistic guidance from Maritain, a staunch Catholic and Thomistic philosopher. Maritain attempted to wean Cocteau from his avant-garde ties, his drug dependency, and the high-profile homosexual circle which had formed around him since the death of Radiquet – who in his all too brief life and literary career threatened to eclipse Cocteau.

But Maritain succeeded only temporarily; once *Orphée* went into production, Cocteau inevitably plunged back into the artistic and social pressure-cooker of Paris, away from the calm and isolation of the Côte d'Azur and Maritain's influence. Cocteau's impetus stemmed from his antipathy for the Surrealists, and his need for celebrity, as according to Cocteau, quoted by critic Clément Borgal: "Il faut jeter une bombe. Il faut obtenir un scandale. Il faut en de ces orages qui rafraîchissent l'air. On étouffe. On ne respire plus." [I must heave a bomb. I must cause a scandal. We need one of those storms which clears the air. It's stifling. One cannot breathe.]¹⁷ One can only surmise if the "stifling" sensation that Cocteau overtly alluded to (he is quoted as saying "on étouffe") refers to the theatre scene in the doldrums at that moment in Paris, or the social scene, or perhaps Cocteau's unfamiliarity with leading a life freed

16 Cocteau (1993), 111.

17 Borgal (1977), 80.

from his addiction to opium, and a sense of boredom from having been too long out of the limelight.

Seen from the point of view of Maritain's attempted conversion of Cocteau, *Orphée* becomes the testament of his transformation from penitent and believer back to apostate, from modest orthodoxy to public defiance. The myth become a dominant template for his artistic persona for the remainder of his career. As Païni writes; "Il fut le poète le plus inconnu et le plus célèbre à la fois. Son extrême visibilité ayant protégé son invisibilité." [He was the most unknown and most celebrated poet at the same time. His extreme visibility protected his invisibility.]¹⁸ The poet who used contradiction as self-expression inspires academics to use the same modality as criticism, perpetuating the image of the artist as protean but potentially also a charlatan, as well as being an enigma unto himself. The artist as magician has clear and direct links to the myth of Orpheus in ancient Greece.

Charles Segal regards the positionality of Orpheus in classical myth as a liminal one, with the poet neither here nor there, forming a critical link to the natural world. Inhabiting what the ancients considered the fringes of the civilized world, associated with the barbarian Thracians as much as with the Greeks, Orpheus embodies something of the strangeness of poetry in the world, the mystery of its power over us, and the troubling intrusiveness of its sympathy for the emotions that we cannot always afford. Orpheus sings the world's sorrow and the world's beauty with an intensity that compels the forests and the beasts to follow.¹⁹ Half-man and half-god, the poet Orpheus has the power to divine poetry from the world, transforming what to mortal men is nature's mute façade into songs that have the power to transform our lives' emptiness, if only we would listen.

Segal examines the myth in its many permutations from Virgil and Ovid through Milton to more contemporary incarnations in Rainer-Maria Rilke, Cocteau and Tennessee Williams, as well as pre-Socratic philosophy:

Orpheus too is the mythical forbear of Rilkean poetics, the poet's claim to know the hidden roots of things; but he has earlier incarnations in Heraclitus' knowledge of the paradoxes of existence or in Lucretius' conviction of the invisible realm of the atoms whose movements hold the secrets to all of life and death.²⁰

18 Païni (2003a), 279.

19 Segal (1989), xiii.

20 Segal (1989), xiii.

Through Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets of Orpheus* and Guillaume Apollinaire's *The Bestiary, or Procession of Orpheus* to Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, modern incarnations of Orpheus stress his individualistic mystical and almost shamanistic (Dionysian) qualities, while eliding larger associations with organized religion, by and large: nature in man/woman (or their separation from nature), pre- or post-lapsarian, form the crux.²¹ To a certain extent, this is the terra firma of *Orphée* and *Le Sang d'un poète*.

Cocteau's Orpheus sits at a distinct remove from nature, set in a thoroughly bourgeois milieu that embraces the theatrical. Perhaps echoing the fairground origins of *Parade*,²² and the first production termed "surrealist,"²³ in the stage directions to *Orphée*, Cocteau describes Orphée's room as "un curieux salon. Il ressemble pas mal aux salons des prestidigitateurs. [...] Même les objets familiers ont un air suspect." [a curious room. It is not dissimilar to a conjuror's room. [...] Familiar objects have a strange air.]²⁴ Nature has been deracinated in Cocteau's mise en scène: rather than communing with nature, Orphée's world is a bourgeois or upper-class room in a villa. Far from the traditional interpretation of Orpheus (via Milton), "the Orpheus who once lived [...] [who] sings to trees and rivers [...] [and whose] song will be reborn with the 'fresh' life of the morning that will succeed the darkness that is now approaching," Cocteau's Orpheus endures a separation from nature, an exile which forms an essential part of his existential dilemma.²⁵ An onstage horse is the sole representative of

21 Apollinaire makes overt references to Jesus Christ, but not to Catholicism. Perhaps the two are inseparable in French public consciousness at the time.

22 A parade was a common performance genre in 18th-century Parisian fairground theatre, and in the early 19th-century théâtre de boulevards. Perhaps its closest association in English would be a travelling street theatre, with the emphasis on dance and acrobats, strung along on a plot-line in a style not dissimilar to commedia dell'arte, designed to attract an audience's attention and, in the 19th-century, lure them into the theatre. The 18th century théâtres de la foire in Paris were, in essence, unlicensed and illegal theatres, which were restricted to the Foire St. Germain (near the present day Abbaye de St. Germain in the 6ème arrondissement, and the lesser Foire St. Laurent. Both foires (fairs) had been in existence since at least the 13th century.

23 The term surrealist (sur-réaliste) was invented by Guillaume Apollinaire to describe the ballet: "He invented the term surrealism, applying it to a ballet by Jean Cocteau." Kennedy (2011), vii.

24 The word prestidigitateur in French has several concurrent meanings. While magician or sorcerer are perhaps the most common, there is an inescapable sense of deceit and shabbiness as well, as parallel meanings are card-sharp or swindler. The term was first used to describe acts at the fairs of Paris, in particular the Foire St. Germain, home to popular and folk theatre from the Middle Ages to the Revolution. Cocteau (2005), 16.

25 Segal (1989), 6.

the natural world so intrinsic to the Classical poet Orpheus, albeit a thoroughly anthropomorphized one: “Les jambs de ce cheval ressemblent beaucoup à des jambs d’homme.” [His legs are very like the legs of a man.]²⁶

Cocteau opts for an overt metatheatricality wherein the strings are bared: to him, just as with the prestidigitateur, the atmosphere of sleight-of-hand carries as much importance as the act itself.²⁷ The setting should have a somewhat flimsy and shabby appearance; Wildman translates Cocteau’s directions in French as “[t]he scenery should recall the sham airplanes and ships of certain photographers,”²⁸ but it should be noted that Cocteau uses *forains*,²⁹ not certain, with *forains* being the French word used to denote performers, dancers, charlatans, snake oil salesmen and others who performed at the fairground theatres of Paris from the Middle Ages through to the late 18th century, later migrating to les théâtres des boulevards at the dawn of the 19th century.³⁰ And the play itself is framed as illusionistic by a brief Prologue by the actor playing Orpheus, who implores the audience’s patience, explaining that “Here is the cause of my request: we are playing at a great height without a safety net. The least untimely noise imperils us, my comrades and I.”³¹ The Rousseauian ideal of unmediated nature has no place in Cocteau’s *trompe-l’œil* hall of illusions and house of mirrors.

Rather than rhapsodizing and charming beasts, Cocteau’s Orpheus desperately attempts to commune with his muse via the “horse” (a horse’s head with human legs) on stage. The horse, like a talking horse in a fairground show (as in Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck*), sends messages via taps and other coded, physical messages. Orpheus sits at a table, Eurydice his wife sits apart from him, while her husband listens to the horse tapping his feet while consulting a “spiritualist’s alphabet.”³² His inspiration dried up, the horse provides the source for Orpheus’ poetic stimulation:

26 Cocteau (2005), 16.

27 The Cocteau retrospective features a photo of Léonide Massine dancing the role of the “prestidigitateur chinois” in *Parade*. Cocteau (2003), 184.

28 Cocteau (1961), 4.

29 “Le décor rappellera les aéroplanes ou navires trompe-l’œil chez les photographes forains.” Cocteau (2005), 17.

30 The théâtres du boulevard, specifically les théâtres du boulevard du crime (the Boulevard du Temple in the 4th and 9th arrondissements of Paris) in the 1830s formed the subject matter of Marcel Carné’s 1944 film *Les enfants du paradis*, regarded by many film critics as one of the best films in the history of French, and world, cinema.

31 Cocteau (1961), 19.

32 Cocteau (1961), 11.

Orphée. My life, like game, was beginning to get high, and, on the turn, was beginning to stink of success and death. . . . This horse plunges into my night and reappears like a diver. He brings back sentences. Don't you feel that the least of these sentences is more remarkable than all the poems? I would give my complete works for one of those little sentences in which I listen to myself as you listen to the sea in a shell. Not serious? But what can you want, my dear? I am discovering a new world, I am living again, I am stalking the unknown.

Eurydice. You are going to quote me again the famous sentence.

Orphée. [Gravely] Yes. [He goes toward the HORSE and recites.] Orphée hunts Eurydice's lost life.³³

Cocteau's use of dramatic foreshadowing in the scene is clear enough, as is the symbolism of night and a diver returning from the depths of the sea. The sea, in mythology and in both Freudian and Jungian psychology, forms a symbol for the unconscious: diving into the sea becomes an act where the diver plunges into the unconscious in order to emerge with renewed creativity. But the journey comes with significant dangers: those who fail to undergo the passage risk madness or death.

Cocteau's version hews closely to both Virgil's and Ovid's versions of the tale, in *The Georgics* Book IV and *Metamorphoses* Book X, respectively. These in turn come from Greek myth, poetry, and images from pottery that date to the early seventh century BCE, making the first recognizable images of Orpheus perhaps contemporaneous with *Homer's Odyssey*.³⁴ The plot can be summarized thus:

The most familiar version of the myth is that of Virgil and Ovid. Eurydice, the bride of Orpheus, is fatally bitten by a snake; the singer, relying on the power of his art, descends to Hades to win her back, persuades the gods of the underworld to relinquish her, but loses her again when he disobeys their command not to look back. Renouncing women (and in one version turning to homosexual love), he is torn apart by a band of angry Maenads. The head and lyre, still singing, float down the Hebrus River to the island of Lesbos, where Apollo protects the head from a snake and endows it with prophetic power.³⁵

33 Cocteau (1961), 11.

34 Graf and Johnston (2007), 133.

35 Segal (1989), 2.

In Cocteau's version Eurydice also dies due to poisoning, but from licking an envelope sent by the Bacchantes who are set upon killing Orpheus, not from a snake bite.³⁶ Orpheus descends to Hades in search of Death, in this case played by a woman (memorably played in the 1950 film by Maria Casares), by passing through a mirror, enabled by magic rubber gloves. He brings Eurydice back, with the same injunction against looking at her, with the same result: Orpheus glances at her, thereby sending Eurydice back to Hades for eternity. As in the myth, Orpheus is torn to shreds by the Bacchantes; however in *Orphée* his head still has the power to speak, mounted on a pedestal. At the end of the play Cocteau's Orpheus finds his wife again, the two reunited in heaven, with Heurtebise, a glazier (a character of Cocteau's invention and subject of his 1925 poem *L'Ange Heurtebise*), their guardian angel. Cocteau played the part of Heurtebise in a 1927 revival of the production, presenting himself as a doubly liminal stage presence: the author/poet, in the tradition of Orpheus, as the intermediary between life and the afterlife.

Cocteau's script follows the classical model in outline, yet differs in substance, underlining standard modernist tropes such as the artist's alienation, mankind's separation from nature, the quest for identity and queries concerning sexuality, the last particularly cogent in Cocteau's case.

In the original myth, while Orpheus' poetry charms Death into releasing Eurydice, the telos of the story points towards knowledge of the afterlife, as underlined by noted classicist C. M. Bowra:

It is clear . . . that though Orpheus's visit to Hades was inspired by love for his dead wife, it resulted in his acquiring knowledge about the afterworld, and from this we may deduce that his descent was connected with Orphic mysteries and that the recovery of his wife did not necessarily have pride of place in it.³⁷

Cocteau's Orpheus, rather, assigns all credit to God for sending Heurtebise as their guide to Hades and the afterlife, thanking him in a thoroughly conformist and somewhat trite ending to the thirteen scene play:

O God, we thank thee for assigning us our house and home as the only paradise, and for having opened to us thy paradise. We thank thee for having sent Heurtebise to us, and we are guilty of not recognizing him as our Guardian Angel. We thank thee for having saved Eurydice, because

36 Cocteau (1961), 22.

37 Bowra (1952), 122.

through love, she killed the devil in the shape of a horse, and in doing so she died. We thank thee for having saved me because I adored poetry, and thou art poetry.³⁸

While Cocteau stays in line with the original meaning of the myth, i.e. the divine origins of poetry, Orphism as construed and practiced in Antiquity was enmeshed with the Eleusinian Mysteries and worship of Dionysus. It formed a mystical, cathartic and potentially dangerous poetic and religious practice, associated with foreign cults and practices othered, or estranged, by pre-classical Greece, as Orpheus, like Dionysus, was of Asiatic origins. Orpheus is credited with introducing Dionysus into Greece, according to Graf and Johnston and other critics: "Hellenistic and later authors, at least, agree that he introduced the mystery cult of Dionysus, but perhaps as early as the fifth century, he was connected with the Eleusinian Mysteries. . . ."³⁹ What is critical here to note is the problematic relationship between Orpheus and greater society: his position, as a poet, seems to have been on the margins, never fully incorporated, yet neither fully alienated, the poet in essence, the gatekeeper of the liminal.

While death and transfiguration form the outcome of both versions, Cocteau's forms a distinctly modern take, centering on the author, and his brief conversion to Catholicism. Cocteau most probably inserted overt references to God as closure to his play to rile Breton and the Surrealists, as they denigrated Christianity as well as its roots in the Classical world. In the Surrealists' early manifesto "Comme il fait beau!", a scene is described wherein two monkeys draw a genealogical tree with names: one monkey completes the names Sade, [de] Chirico and Hegel, among others, while the other primate finishes inscribing other names on the tree, including those of Lautréamont Rousseau, Apollinaire, Galileo, Freud, Rimbaud, Jarry, Marat and Robespierre. The new Surrealist pantheon of revolutionary forbearers includes not a single name from the traditional French canon nor the classical and humanist pantheon of philosophers, religious figures, politicians and literary lions.⁴⁰ However one name from the Classical world does receive mention, an infamous one: Nero. Likewise Artaud,

38 Cocteau (1961), 45–6.

39 Graf and Johnston (2007), 171.

40 "Deux singes, un insect-feuille. Au lever du rideau le premier singe complete à la craie l'arbre généalogique sur lequel figurant déjà un certain nombre de noms: Sade, Nouveau, Chirico, Cravan, Hegel Vaché. Lebaudy. Sous la dictée deuxième singe on le voit remplir les écussons vacants: Lautrémont, Henri Rousseau, Roussel, Néron, Apollinaire, Montgolfier, Freud, Rimbaud, Galilée, Jarry, Marat, Robespierre, Colomb, Fantômas, Deschanel, Rosa-Josephe et enfin Silexame." Breton et al. (2002), 48.

in 1934, would laud the Emperor Heliogabalus for his “systematic and joyous demoralization of the Latin mind and consciousness; and he would have carried this subversion of the Latin world to the limit if he had lived long enough to complete it.”⁴¹ The Surrealists engaged in a program that envisioned the complete subversion of the Western Judo-Christian and Classical tradition; Cocteau sought its redemption through his transfiguration as Orpheus.

Cocteau seeks to infuse the mundane bourgeois world of the poet adrift, in search of his muse, with a sense of the surreal, of forces beyond his characters’ knowledge or control. The stage directions at the beginning of the play indicate that “in spite of the April-blue sky and the clear light, one suspects that it is surrounded by mysterious forces. Even familiar objects have a suspicious air.”⁴² The mirror, perhaps the central stage decoration in the play and the gateway to the underworld, assumes particular importance. Despite the air of mystery, the bourgeois predominates: this is an Orpheus concerned with his public standing, his wife’s perceived infidelity with the glazier Heurtebise, his inability to create or love his wife as before, and his fixation upon a talking horse’s head, a psychological aberration. Cocteau’s Orpheus, far from being the classical poet/magician/shaman, has become a passive bourgeois, reduced to waiting for cryptic messages from his equine muse, as his own song/spells or *epôidai*, no longer enchant nor appear to him. Cut adrift from his source, alienated from his identity as a poet, Orpheus embodies a 1920s version of a telecommuter, working at home, bickering with his wife and worrying about his career while he awaits artistic inspiration from his internet, a denaturalized horse-head. In an ironic inversion of the original myth of the poet who charmed animals, plants and even inanimate nature, this new Orpheus dotes upon a deracinated representative of nature, the bodiless horse, in a setting apart from nature, in the hope that his creative fire, his poetry, may be rekindled by another crypto-poetic message as interpreted from the horse head in the corner.

The setting of the room, as described by Cocteau in the stage directions, resembles a decoupage or assemblage of objects *trouvé*, much in the spirit of Dadaism and Marcel Duchamp, underlining the fractured yet quotidian setting, with only the unusual light on the set which gives the aforementioned “mysterious” or “suspicious” side-show air, recalling the chiaroscuro surrealist paintings of de Chirico. A horse head, human legs, earthenware wash basin, bookcase, a niche with a pedestal framed by laurel leaves, a writing table. But unlike Dadaism’s forceful rejection of the accumulated cultural

41 Artaud (1988), 319.

42 Cocteau (1961), 3.

history and traditions of Western civilization, or Surrealism's intentionally random use of imagery as a replication of the life of the unconscious, as critic Nemer points out, Cocteau's œuvre is "studded with references. And these references do not come from the most avant-garde margins of western civilization, but from the main heritage, classic and academic, which constitute the base for public instruction and the imagery of illustrated dictionaries."⁴³ Cocteau, perhaps due to his ongoing feud with the Surrealists, counters modernity with antiquity (as Picasso did at the same time in the mid-1920s in his classicist paintings) as part of the poet's search for identity and renewal.

Heurtebise plays a central role in Cocteau's refashioning of the myth as the guardian angel of Orpheus and Eurydice, and as their guide to the underworld and back. As a glazier, he comprehends the mystery of the mirror, a potent symbol in both *Orphée* and *Le Sang d'un poète*. In Scene Seven, Heurtebise informs Orphée; "Mirrors are the doors through which Death comes and goes. Don't tell anyone. You only have to watch yourself all your life in a mirror, and you'll see Death at work like bees in a glass hive,"⁴⁴ and just a few lines later tells the poet, distressed by his wife's death "You know, mirrors are connected in a way with glazing. That's our trade."⁴⁵

In *Le Sang d'un poète* the protagonist – the nameless poet – urged by his muse, an armless Greco-Roman statue (played by interwar avant-garde icon Lee Miller) plunges through a mirror, growing smaller and smaller, swimming in the black immensity until vanishing from sight, and then ascends towards the surface, hands searching in the pervasive darkness like those of a somnambulist.⁴⁶ The image of the mirror in its wooden frame, the portal to unconsciousness and death, is in turn echoed and negated in the following scenes by a hallway with locked doors – with similar wooden frames – which the poet cannot open. The protagonist/poet peers through keyholes, crawling, struggling from door to door, a cinematographic sleight-of-hand where Cocteau tilted the set so that the actor playing the poet, shirtless with tight knee-breeches and leather shoes, crawled from door to door on the floor, doubling as the hallway wall.

43 "...l'œuvre de Cocteau est bardée des références. Et ces références sont issues non des marges les plus avancées de la culture occidentale, mais du tronc principal, classique et académique, qui constitue le fond de sauce de l'instruction publique et l'imagerie des dictionnaires illustrés." Nemer (2003), 25.

44 Cocteau (1961), 29.

45 Cocteau (1961), 29.

46 *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930).

Peering through a keyhole, the protagonist observes the shadow of a hand loading an opium pipe, followed by smoke emerging from the pipe.⁴⁷ The shadow-play reminds evokes the Indonesian theatre exhibit (specifically *wayang kulit*) which had impressed the Parisian public during the Paris Colonial Exposition of August 1931 during the filming of *Le Sang d'un poète*, including Antonin Artaud. Artaud, like Cocteau, had “associated for some time with the [...] surrealist movement” and like Cocteau “he was too independent a spirit to remain linked with any school of thought.”⁴⁸ The similarities between the two avant-garde icons are odd but striking, for artists who ultimately are so unlike: both Surrealist renegades, drug addicts, one-man theatre movements, Surrealist film-makers, graphic artists and poets as well. Artaud regarded the influence of the Orient as metaphysical in essence:

The revelation of the Balinese Theater had been to provide us with a physical and non-verbal idea of theater in which theater is contained within the limits of everything that can happen in a stage independently of the written text, whereas the theater as we conceive it in the west is closely related to the text and limited by it. In our Western theater the Word is everything and there is nothing outside of the Word. Theatre is a branch of literature. . . .⁴⁹

A comparison between Cocteau and Artaud is critical here, as both sought in their theatre projects access, or at least the intimation of access, to transcendental powers which could connect the theatrical event to larger, extra-theatrical forces. Cocteau's clear allusions to Catholic belief have previously been noted. Artaud, transfixed by these allegedly “metaphysical tendencies” of Oriental theatre, “in contrast to Western theater with its psychological and realist tendencies,”⁵⁰ was indulging in more than a little Orientalism himself; for an Indonesian viewer viewing *wayang kulit* versions of the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, while metaphysical dimensions abounded in the play, more practical lessons concerning dharma and karma were equally prevalent, a consideration neglected by Artaud, due no doubt to his relative unfamiliarity with this performing art.

Artaud's valorization of theatre's non-verbal and plastic qualities does not find its expression in Cocteau's theatre; however it does so in *Le Sang d'un poète*. Critic Yann Beauvais claims that in Cocteau's films, especially in this one, Cocteau “did

47 Artaud (1930).

48 Bansat-Boudon, 345.

49 Artaud (1988), 267.

50 Artaud (1988), 271.

not want to make poetry with film, but wished that his film would be the vehicle for poetry, the medium from which poetry would come.”⁵¹ The film focuses upon familiar and dominant symbols and themes in Cocteau’s cinema, theatre, and literature – mirrors, doors, Death, homoeroticism, games of chance – a cinematic poem which achieves the artist’s, and Orpheus’ ultimate desire: to cheat Death and reclaim life. For if the mirror, according to Heurtebise, reveals the ineluctable progress of death, cinema and the other arts arrest death’s advancement by fixing the image forever, an idea that Cocteau apparently seized upon from an early age, as his graphic works feature an almost endless array of self-portraits.

In the Pompidou Center catalogue of the Cocteau exhibit, Païni prefaces a small selection of graphic works entitled “L’homme invisible” with the following observations, the first on Cocteau’s incessant self-referencing, or self-examination: “Cocteau never stopped from self-interrogation in order to put himself in impossible dilemmas, to be, above all, the observer of all and to intervene in all, but to live masqued, to protect the authenticity of his secrets and of his phantoms. . . .”⁵² Looking at the self-portraits and one photo, all executed between 1910 to 1919, one observes five pencil sketches: two entitled “Autoportrait sans visage <cubiste>”; two with the same preceding title without the parenthetical descriptor “cubist,” all dating between 1910 and 1913; and one quadruple portrait of Cocteau from 1915–1916.⁵³ All are self-portraits – except for one of the quadruple portraits – which reveal the same features: the face is blank (*sans visage*), without identity or – an alternative interpretation that cannot be disregarded – a neutral masque that covers his face up to the hair-line, and leaving only the ears and his hair visible.

Cocteau’s inability to fix self-identity, or perhaps more accurately his endless return to the inherent instability of identity, the slippage between the referent and the referred, reflects the dominant epistemological and heuristic concern of Western philosophy and the arts since the late Enlightenment: how to represent the object, and the role of aesthetics in attempting to do so. Terry Eagleton, in discussing Kant and the possibility of the knowledge of others, writes that knowledge

of human subjects is impossible not because they are so devious, multiple and decentered as to be impenetrably opaque, but because it is

51 “Cocteau ne veut pas faire de la poésie avec le cinema, il souhaite que son film soit le véhicule de la poésie, le support à partir duquel la poésie advient.” Beauvais (2003), 79.

52 “Cocteau ne cessa de s’interroger pour s’installer dans ces impossibles dilemmes: être partout, observer tout et tous et intervenir dans tout, mais vivre masque, protéger l’authenticité de ses secrets et de ses fantasmes. . . .” Païni (2003a), 279.

53 Cocteau (2003), 281–3.

simply a mistake to think that the subject is the kind of thing that could ever possibly be known. It is just not a feasible object of cognition, any more than Being is something we could know in the same manner as a slab of marzipan.⁵⁴

Eagleton's quote, culinary similes aside, provides insight into Cocteau's condition as examined in *Orphée* and *Le Sang d'un poète*. Cocteau, as the self-willed artist, looks into the mirror (how else to draw a self-portrait?) and sees a blank. Orphée, in the play of the same name, looks into the mirror and goes through it, piercing representation (albeit momentarily), the divide between subject and other, to establish contact with the deepest extent of the creative unconscious – a scene in the play that remains unrepresented, as Orphée, with the red gloves left behind by Death now on his hands, enters the mirror exclaiming "Eurydice . . ." in Scene Seven, and re-emerging at the beginning of Scene Nine (followed by Eurydice a few lines later), questions Heurtebise "What, still here?"⁵⁵ Likewise in *Le Sang d'un poète*, the poet's rupture of his image, i.e. the subject regarding self as object, produces a representation of a journey into darkness, or the unconscious, in search of the kernel of identity – only for the poet to resurface and encounter further difficulties in knowing the objective, i.e., the phenomenal world. His journey down the hallway encountering locked doors which refuse to disclose their secrets in many ways forms the perfect visual metaphor for not only the impossibility of knowledge of "the other" (i.e., the object) but also of the subject.

In *Orphée*, the impossibility of fixing identity vis-à-vis the mirror finds perhaps its most significant interpretation in the works of Jacques Lacan, in particular the mirror stage of individuation, and in his theories on the gaze and anamorphosis, specifically catoptric anamorphosis, or a distorted image or projection reflected by a mirror, an image that requires a special device or specific vantage point in order to reconstitute the image. The word anamorphosis is constructed of two Greek root words: the prefix *ana* meaning back or again; and *morphe*, meaning form or shape; when properly viewed with said device or from the proper angle, the parts become whole.

In her article "Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': Where To Begin," Jane Gallop summarizes Lacan's clinical observation thus:

Briefly: in the mirror stage, the infant who has not yet mastered the upright posture and who is supported by either another person or some device will, upon seeing herself in the mirror, "jubilantly assume" the

54 Eagleton (1994), 75.

55 Cocteau (1961), 29–31.

upright position. She thus finds “already there” in the mirror image a mastery that she will actually learn only later. The jubilation, the enthusiasm, is tied to the temporal dialectic by which she appears already to be what she will only later become.⁵⁶

The infant comes to associate its self-identity as coming from an external image or source, and as this double is ever-changing, and forever in the present, identity is constantly in a state of becoming, an idea that Cocteau seems to presage in his fixation upon endless self-transformation. Associations with the myths of Orpheus and Dionysus figure prominently in Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” as at this stage, before this pivotal encounter with the self-as-object in the mirror, the self (or “I”) figures as “‘le corps morcelé’ (the body in bits and pieces), a Lacanian term for a violently non-totalized body image.”⁵⁷ In both the myths of Orpheus and Dionysus, the poet/mystic/shaman perishes from being torn to pieces their assailants, only to be reborn whole later, an endless cycle of destruction, death and transfiguration.

The mirror in *Orphée* and *Le Sang d’un poète* plays out as the central symbol for self-construction of identity as well as a catoptric anamorphic object. Several references in the play make this clear. Azrael, one of Death’s two attendants, explains to Raphael, the other attendant, albeit an inexperienced one: “Death to reach living things, has to pass through an element which deforms and displaces them [referring to the mirror]. Our apparatus [referring to a radio they must tune to the right frequencies, but also to the rubber gloves needed to pass through the mirror] allows her to reach them where she sees them, thus saving calculations and a considerable amount of time.”⁵⁸

A few pages later, about to pass through the mirror using the rubber gloves, he states to Death “I can’t see how this mirror can be soft,”⁵⁹ underlining the instability of the object. Early on in the play, when Orphée and Eurydice discuss the Aglaonice’s (the leader of the Bacchantes) poetry, Eurydice states that “from a certain angle, and on a certain plane, she has ability,”⁶⁰ to which Orphée responds “very well then, by that angle and by that plane I declare that I have had enough of it; that I am persecuted.”⁶¹ Immediately after Orphée has broken his vow to never look at Eurydice, and she “sinks slowly into the mirror and disappears,”⁶² Orphée crosses to the table and discovers a letter which

56 Gallop (1983), 120.

57 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis, quoted in Gallop (1983), 121.

58 Cocteau (1961), 25.

59 Cocteau (1961), 29.

60 Cocteau (1961), 15.

61 Cocteau (1961), 15.

62 Cocteau (1961), 34.

has been delivered in his absence, when he descended to Hades. He opens the letter and has the following exchange with Heurtebise:

Orphée. What's this?

Heurtebise. Some bad news?

Orphée. I can't read it; the letter is written backwards.

Heurtebise. That's a way of disguising the handwriting. Read it in the mirror.

Orphée. [In front of the mirror, reads]. "Sir, Excuse my preserving my incognito. Aglaonice has discovered that the initial letters of your sentence: 'Orphée Hunts Eurydice's Lost Life,' together form a word which is offensive to the jury of the competition." [ORPHÉE says to himself.] O, H, E, L, L. O Hell! [ORPHÉE continues to read.] "She has convinced the jury that you are a hoaxer. She has stirred up against you half of the women of the town. In short, an enormous troop of mad women under her orders is coming toward your house. The Bacchantes lead the way and demand your death. Escape and hide yourself. Do not lose a minute. From one who wishes you well."⁶³

The poem in question forms the entirety of the phrase as interpreted by Orphée from his horse-muse. The Bacchantes tear Cocteau's Orphée to pieces, throwing his head through a window onto the floor, where it speaks "Where am I? [...] And my body, my body hurts me so much. [...] I'm speaking about my head [...] where is my head? [...] I've lost my head and my body."⁶⁴ Eurydice emerges from the mirror:

Eurydice [Taking the invisible body by the hand]. I have your hand in mine. Walk. Don't be afraid. Let yourself go. . . .

Orphée's head. Where is my body?

Eurydice. Near me. Against me.⁶⁵

63 Cocteau (1961), 36.

64 Cocteau (1961), 38.

65 Cocteau (1961), 39.

The stage directions then indicate that "EURYDICE and the invisible body of ORPHÉE sink into the mirror."⁶⁶ Heurtebise enters and places Orphée's head, in the next scene (Scene 10) on the pedestal: "HEURTEBISE rushes to ORPHÉE's head, picks it up, hesitates, put [sic] on the pedestal. . . . It is now that the actor who plays ORPHÉE substitutes his own head for that of the mask."⁶⁷ The pedestal indicated in the stage directions no doubt would be the empty pedestal framed by laurel leaves indicated in the opening stage directions: the morcellated poet, crowned with the traditional emblem of honor for poets, now doubles the horse head across the stage, both in the Lacanian pre-mirror state of unindividuated existence. When next seen in Scene Thirteen, Orphée is reassembled as whole, in the company of Heurtebise and Eurydice, after they pass through the mirror to the stage, the latter now representing Heaven.

The parallels with Lacan's theories of individuation, the gaze and catoptric anamorphosis and with the mirror, dialogue and sequence of events in Cocteau's *Orphée* are striking. Cocteau's manipulation of the classical myth of Orpheus reveals the poet Cocteau as Orpheus, encountering himself-as-object, endeavoring to fuse self and other, but ultimately failing as he achieves identity only in heaven, which is to say, nowhere. Had Cocteau not terminated his play with this ending, with clearly religious symbolism featuring transfiguration and transubstantiation, *Orphée* would have become an endless act of becoming, of striving to become one, failing, then morcellation, transfiguration and becoming whole again (the Coctelian Tautology) guided through successive stages by his guardian angel Heurtebise, this character another facet of the author. This obvious allusion to Catholicism, along with mutual antipathy, formed part of what the Surrealists found so objectionable to *Orphée*. This rather traditionalist ending to the play ran counter to Breton's anti-Christian rhetoric, along with his close alliance with the French and International Communist Parties. The imbrication of Cocteau with the stage character Orphée, which involved no little narcissism on the author's part (again the mirror, this time as a symbol of self-absorption), would have been viewed by many as just another act of self-promotion and hubris by Jean Cocteau. However, for Cocteau, the slings and arrows of his critics never seemed to inflict debilitating injuries: how could they when, if need be, another transformation would provide escape and render him whole again, albeit temporarily?

66 Cocteau (1961), 39.

67 Cocteau (1961), 40.

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The Classical Past and ‘The History of Ourselves’: Laura Riding’s Trojan Woman

Anett Jessop

As well as any other, Erato,
I can dwell separately on what men know
In common secrecy, . . .

Laura Riding, “*As Well As Any Other*” (1926)¹

• • •

The problem of determining the true story of Troy is not one for the scholar at all. It is a poet’s problem, requiring a delicate balance between a sense of the past and a sense of the present – since a story of past events must include the present from which they are viewed.

Riding, *A Trojan Ending* (1937)²

• •

From their Mediterranean base on the Spanish island of Mallorca, literary partners Robert Graves and Laura Riding produced a succession of historical novels populated with figures from the Classical world.³ Much has been written about Graves’ late-modernist recreations of Roman and Byzantine emperors in *I, Claudius* (1934), *Claudius the God* (1935), and *Count Belisarius* (1938) in

1 Gottschalk (1926), 9.

2 Riding (1937b), xxvi.

3 Riding and her literary partner Robert Graves published several influential and provocative treatises on modernism and their contemporaries: *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927/1928), *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928). Under her own name Riding published *Contemporaries and Snobs* (1928b). Riding and Graves are often credited with the early use of the term “modernism” and with first modeling close reading, a strategy later elaborated by William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). Additionally, they cofounded Seizin Press and the journal *Epilogue*.

which he imbues his rulers with modern anxieties and pathologies in "auto-biographic" narratives.⁴ Less assessed are Riding's re-castings of historical and legendary events through her focus on the stories of women associated with Classical rulers and heroes in her two novels *A Trojan Ending* (1937) and *Lives of Wives* (1939). In her preface to *A Trojan Ending*, Riding reflects: "I find myself regarding the officially historical history of ourselves as an alien record. Is not history supposed to be the history of ourselves – the past supposed to be our past?"⁵ In response she reorients her historical narratives to resuscitate silent and missing players by chronicling the Classical past through the women's point-of-view, wherein "the principal male characters are . . . written of as husbands rather than as heroes."⁶

Certainly the figures, epics, and achievements of the Classical world resonated for modernist writers – as well as theorists, philosophers, and artists⁷ – and even against the backdrop of experimentation and Ezra Pound's cry to "make it new," influential modernists like T. S. Eliot were assaying their relationship to the past in essays like "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919). Modernist men, like Eliot, found predecessors in the great Classical writers, seers, statesmen, and soldiers, as evidenced in their many allusions in *The Waste Land*.⁸ While some modernist women writers incorporated Classical motifs into their works – notably in the poetry and translations of H. D. and the prose of Mary Butts – their reception of the Classical legacy was more problematic, Gordian even, than that of their male colleagues. As the women of antiquity were largely portrayed in the supporting roles of wife, mother, maid, or kingdom-toppling seductress – the heroic roles went mainly to female divinities – modernist women writers inherited an historical and literary canon

4 Graves continued his work in Classical studies and mythology. A sampling of these works include *The Golden Fleece* (1944), *Hercules, My Shipmate* (1945), *Homer's Daughter* (1955), *The Greek Myths* (1955), *The Siege and Fall of Troy* (1962); as well as translations, including *The Anger of Achilles: The Iliad* (1959).

5 Riding (1937b), xvi. The word "ourselves" is conspicuously repeated across the novel. The emphasis works to align the contemporary reader with the characters and events in the past.

6 Riding (1939), 5. In *Lives of Wives*, Riding depicts the perspectives and influences of the wives of Classical 'great' men (Cyrus, Philip the Great, Aristotle, Alexander, Herod).

7 Examples of other modernist writers engaging the Classical tradition include W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Rainer Maria Rilke, Jean Cocteau, Wyndham Lewis; theorists and philosophers: Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, T. E. Hulme, Mikhail Bakhtin, Martin Heidegger; as well as artists, including Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, Henry Bacon – architect of the neoclassically-styled Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, which was officially dedicated in 1922.

8 In *The Waste Land*, Eliot references Classical writers (Homer, Ovid, Petronius, St. Augustine, Sophocles, Vergil), seers (Tiresias), statesmen and soldiers (Aeneas, Coriolanus, Marc Antony).

that was less than empowering, even oppressive, as they worked to determine their own historicity and kinships in the past.

Recent scholarship working at the intersections of Classical studies, reception theory, Modernist studies, and feminist theory illuminates historical shifts and rifts in what Eliot designated as the “tradition.”⁹ As Seth Schein argues in “‘Our Debt to Greece and Rome’: Canon, Class and Ideology,” access to knowledge of the languages of antiquity was more often restricted to a privileged class, which served to reinforce the authority of “a social order and a set of institutions, beliefs, and values that are commonly associated with western civilization and ‘our’ western cultural heritage.”¹⁰ One of the standing principles of this canon was that the Classical tradition is *de facto* a masculinist tradition chronicling patriarchal history. In fact, until the late-nineteenth century, Anglo-American women were institutionally prohibited from learning the classical languages and reading the texts in the original – which thereby disqualified them from university entrance and social and political mobility. According to Schein:

Unequal access to education was also an important means of maintaining the subordination of women [...]. The educational barriers to a classical, humanistic education both expressed and reinforced the lower status of girls and women and their inability to share in the prestige and power to which knowledge of the classics might lead.¹¹

Early twentieth-century women activists recognized that knowledge of the Classics conveyed legitimacy and authority and, for this reason, when modernist women writers did employ Classical figures and references, they did so with a different agenda: a move to reinstate and revitalize the status of Classical women, as did H. D. with her evocations of Helen, Demeter, Eurydice, Leda, as well as Sappho. In her article, “‘What Difference Was Made?’: Feminist Models of Reception,” Vanda Zajko assesses the impact of feminist theorizing of early historical works as well as the often fraught status of feminist scholars attempting cross-disciplinary reception studies: “Doing ‘feminist Classics’ involved the rethinking of the possibilities for the field of study in terms both of subject matter and methodology” especially for a discipline like “Classics . . . ‘that confers

9 See Rosenblitt (2016); Flack (2015); Vandiver (2010); Graziosi and Greenwood (2007); Clayton (2004); Lively (2006).

10 Schein (2008), 75.

11 Schein (2008), 80.

status by evoking tradition with all its weight.”¹² Attention to the critical and creative methodologies employed by modernist women writers who aligned with late First-wave feminism is central to the project of reception analysis.

One of the most multifaceted and daring reappropriations of the Classical tradition was achieved by the under-studied American modernist Laura Riding (1901–1991). From the launch of her career, she set herself in dialogue with the Classical tradition, as illustrated in the epigraph above. In “As Well As Any Other,” the opening poem of her first collection of poetry, *The Close Chaplet* (1926), Riding evokes Erato, Greek muse of lyric poetry, to both register her separate status as a woman writer and assert her right to share in an enterprise traditionally reserved – by men – for men. In her poetry, fiction, and essays, she pressures the foundational status of the Classical and Western traditions and thereby presages a feminist critique of that history that will unfold in the course of the twentieth century.¹³ In *A Trojan Ending* – the subject of this examination – her concentration on and, in some cases, reinstatement of Trojan and Greek women (Cressida and Helen, in particular) and her revision of their representations as well as those of associated Classical men serve, in effect, as a modernist rewriting (re-righting) of the origin stories of the Western world. Further, Riding sets herself, by virtue of the novel’s narrative voice, alongside the writers of the past. By accentuating the absence of women from the chronicles of history, she calls into question the accuracy of historical records and, thereby, the biases of scribal authorship. In so doing, Riding’s historical fiction acts to subvert the authoritative status of canonical histories.

A Trojan Ending is Riding’s extensive rewriting of the last year of the legendary battle between Troy and Greece, including the sacking of the Trojan stronghold.¹⁴ Riding counters the narratives surrounding two legendary women who come down in literature as traitors to men. Her novel depicts the drama of personalities and their motivations, the relationships, and critical decisions that cluster around the legendary-historical events. Scenes unfold almost entirely in domestic spaces rather than battlefields as sites for dramatic action; palace bedrooms, the court viewing tower, and sleeping tents are the alternative seats

12 Zajko (2008), 199.

13 Examples of other Riding publications that engage and challenge Classical and Enlightenment figures and motifs include *Voltaire: A Biographical Fantasy*, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, *Epilogue: A Critical Summary*, vols. I, II, III, *Collected Poems*.

14 According to biographer Elizabeth Friedmann (2005), who was in close conversation with Riding during the last decades of her life, Riding had studied the work of “classical historian and geographer William Leaf . . . for her novel about Cressida,” and she acknowledged that debt by dedicating *A Trojan Ending* to Leaf’s daughter, Katharine West (286–7).

of power and women are notably present and relatively free to speak. Helen's notoriety is pervasive in the early Trojan War cycles while Cressida – despite her enduring presence in the European literary canon – is missing. Cressida is, in fact, a literary construct and her character's evolution a study in motivated authorial invention. Her name is a conflation of the names of two Trojan women, Chryseis and Briseis, who were captured by the Greeks, as recorded in Homer's *Iliad* and the accounts of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, although neither woman has any relationship to Troilus.¹⁵ Her legend is invented and then refashioned by canonical Medieval and Early Modern European authors, notably Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, and William Shakespeare.

As Derek Pearsall has claimed, the evolution of the Cressida narrative offers both a study in earlier-period European receptions of the Trojan War cycles as well as a mirroring of popular tastes in the conventions of romance genre.¹⁶ The reception history also reveals a cultural history of women's often precarious social position and limited power in romantic relationships. The recognizable version of the Cressida story is realized in Boccaccio's Italian verse narrative *Il Filostrato* (1338), wherein he develops an earlier Troy cycle romance created by the French poet Benoît de Sainte-Maure in his *Roman de Troie* (c. 1160).¹⁷ Briseida is the name given to Troilus' love interest by Sainte-Maure, and Boccaccio renames her Criseida. In Boccaccio's romance *Troilo*, the Trojan prince and Priam's son, is in love with Criseida, a widow and daughter of the Trojan priest Calcas who has defected to the Greek camp. Calcas engineers a hostage exchange in which Criseida is brought to the Greek encampment. Diomedes beguiles her and she deserts Troilo – even while pretending in her letters to remain faithful. Troilo seeks revenge on Diomedes in battle but is unsuccessful and is eventually killed by Achilles. As in Sainte-Maure's version, Boccaccio's Criseida is made, in Stephen Barney's words, "an exemplum of bad female behavior."¹⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer reworks Boccaccio's tale in his Middle English version, *Troilus and Criseyde* (1381–1386), and he enlarges both the tale's dramatic and comedic depth within the conventions of medieval court romance. Criseyde is given greater character range and Chaucer offers

15 Riding mentions both Chryeis and Bryseis in *A Trojan Ending* (see pages 29 and 147–8). Latin versions of these Trojan War accounts were available to Medieval and Early Modern audiences: Dictys of Crete's *Journal of the Trojan War* and Dares the Phrygian's *History of the Destruction of Troy*.

16 Pearsall (2015). Pearsall footnotes other histories of Cressida in the course of the article.

17 In Benoît de Sainte-Maure's work, Briseida is the daughter of the Trojan priest Calcus who has defected to the Greek camp. She is accused of infidelity when she betrays her troth to Troilus in choosing the Greek soldier Diomedes after she is traded as a hostage to the Greeks.

18 Barney (2006), xvii.

a regretful disclaimer at the end of his poem for representing women to a disadvantage.¹⁹ By the fifteenth century, Robert Henryson authors his version of the legend, *The Testament of Cresseid* (c. 1490), into Middle Scots. He extends the tale for his Cresseid following her desertion of Troilus by inflicting her with leprosy – typically a euphemism for venereal disease – as a moralizing judgment upon her.²⁰ In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), Cressida enters as a sophisticated court lady who eventually loses mastery of her own purposes in the face of love. During her assignation with Troilus, she repeats the word "false" multiple times. Once she is traded without consent to Diomedes, Shakespeare uses her as the target for the misogynistic jokes of Greek soldiers. As Pearsall notes, the apparatus of the Classical Trojan War legends has been reduced to mere backdrop against which the characters' interactions occur. The authors' innovations, Pearsall asserts, emerge in their translations of the story into a vernacular and an appeal to the contemporary social attitudes. As such, Boccaccio contributes "an urbane and sophisticated modern coloring such as would appeal to fashionable Neapolitan society," while Shakespeare fashions in his rendition "a cynical mockery of heroic values, as well as of the romantic values with which Chaucer had invested [his work]. His Cressida, a lighter figure than Chaucer's, is yet memorable, in her own way, as a brilliant puppet."²¹ This reception history makes clear how each writer converts the story to his own purposes – intensifying and arbitrating the romantic relationship between Troilus and Cressida – as will Riding, in her modernist revision of the conventions of heterosexual romance.

The Cressida narrative offers Riding a template for the missing women of history and an opportunity to refute the Cressida formula, where an amalgam of incidental historical women is retooled to exemplify a negative stereotype: here, the intemperance and infidelity of women in love relationships. She is drawn to Cressida precisely for the instability of that narrative and for her phantom presence behind the metaphorical "yellow wallpaper" – to evoke feminist precursor Charlotte Perkins Gilman's image. In her preface to *A Trojan Ending*, Riding muses:

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- 19 Chaucer: "Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe, / And every gentil woman, what she be, / That al be that Criseyde was untrew, / That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me" (V.1772–5).
- 20 Henryson ends his poem with an admonishment to women: "Now, worthie wemen, in this ballet schort, / Maid for your worschip and instructioun, / Of cheritie, I monische and exhort, / Ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun: / Beir in your mynd this schort conclusioun / Of fair Cresseid, as I have said befor. / Sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir" (ll. 610–6). See Stephen Barney's introduction to Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid* in the Norton Critical Edition to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, 431–2.
- 21 Pearsall, 36–7.

It happened to me to begin thinking of Cressida – as I might have begun thinking of my girlhood, in the comfortable leisure of being older, . . . Cressida is a name on the surface of a story. The names of all women of the deep past have a legendary ring – but none seem so legendary as that of Cressida; even Homer, to whose imagination she must have been at least legendary-real, does not mention her.²²

Riding imagines that Cressida might well have been an important Trojan woman associated with King Priam's court whom Homer dismissed as insignificant in favor of the men warring on the battlefield. Riding is unsatisfied with Chaucer's and Shakespeare's handling of Cressida, although she concedes that Chaucer did "evoke her presence" while Shakespeare reduced her to the role of the "universal flirt of the Elizabethan stage."²³ Cressida is notable because, according to Riding, "There is no story so unfinished as hers, and what is unfinished must be finished. It is this that makes legends: when stories are left unfinished because the life in them was not finished."²⁴ This incomplete and unfulfilled narrative opens the door to authorial elaboration.

In *A Trojan Ending*, Cressida is the daughter of the Trojan priest Calchas who has defected to the Greek camp after a vision of Troy's defeat. Once her father abandons her, Cressida is welcomed into King Priam's household where she becomes an important contributor to court life. In Chaucer's version, Criseyde loves Troilus because he is philosophical, virtuous, and brave – a foil to Criseyde's instability. In Riding's account these characterizations are reversed: Cressida's mental processes are analytical and pragmatic and, in the Trojan court, she is respected for her intelligence and counsel.²⁵ Troilus, on the other hand, suffers from a personality disorder resulting from his mother Queen Hecuba's rejection and his subsequent dependence on surrogates

22 Riding (1937b), xviii.

23 Riding (1937b), xviii–xix. Never, Riding claims, would her Cressida gush, as Shakespeare's does: "Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find, / The error of our eye directs our mind" (xviii). In numerous passages, Riding offers her reception history of the Troilus and Cressida narrative as well as the Trojan War cycles, thereby showing the degree of preparation she made before taking on her revision (see, for example, 406–7).

24 Riding (1937b), xix.

25 Riding (1937b), 75: This is illustrated in an observation made by Helen's royal maid Aethra (mother of Theseus): "[Cressida] understands the power in her and really knows how to control it and do things with it. . . . She has exerted a tremendous influence in the short time she's been at the Palace: she has made you all [Helen and others] pull yourselves together and ask yourselves questions and find answers to them."

like his sister Cassandra and, in time, Cressida.²⁶ Cressida knows that Troilus desires her but she believes a relationship with him is inappropriate, based on her honor code and self-knowledge. During a group conversation with Priam's daughter-in-law Andromache, Troilus' sister Laodice, and a statesman of the Trojan Royal Council, Lampus, Cressida clarifies her stance toward Troilus:

If you mean that Troilus is falling in love with me . . . indeed it's no mystery. And I think it's most unfair. Even if I loved him in return, it's obviously impossible for me to accept attentions from the son of the King whom my father has betrayed – and enjoying, as I do, Priam's confidence and hospitality. Troy wouldn't stand for it, even if Priam did. Troilus must realize this, so it can only be that he is pressing the kind of relation between us that would do more dishonor to Priam's kindness to me than an impolitic marriage.²⁷

When Lampus suggests that Priam would be happy for his son to marry "the right woman," Cressida returns: "The question arises whether Troilus is the right man for me."²⁸ This interaction, and others like it, demonstrates the sophistication of Cressida's understanding of her social position as well as her own desires. Cressida's degree of choice is one of Riding's more radical revisions of the model for romantic relationships between women and men.

Riding's Helen is neither the remorseful nor deceitful figure of legend; she is instead virtuous and resigned to her fate, more often wearing an expression that Cressida terms "her do-with-me-as-you-like look."²⁹ Helen's life's direction seems beyond her control and she lives in a kind of haze, the victim of her un-counteracted destiny: "She was, yes, like a woman in a dream . . . This was how

26 Riding (1937b), 20–3: Hecuba, Troilus' mother, "went a little mad after the birth of a child" and "she had never, really, recovered from her post-natal antipathy toward Troilus, perhaps because he was her last child and she was already old and by this time permanently unbalanced" (20–1). Troilus is described as "always [having] some complaint or other festering in his mind. He would, indeed, have been a really princely young man if it had not been for his querulous cast of face and the slight hang of head he affected – as of someone who suffered injuries beyond his power to avert" (23).

27 Riding (1937b), 42. Riding suggests that Troilus takes a reactionary interest in Cressida once her father betrays her: "Troilus' attitude to her made her feel even more of a stranger. She knew that he was fascinated by her as something 'different'. Before her father's treason he had paid little enough attention to her, though she had been frequently at the Palace because of Calchas' high place as the chief Sun priest" (55).

28 Riding (1937b), 42.

29 Riding (1937b), 49.

many women were, though Helen most of all: caught in the dream, retreating back from the present – the ever-dissolving image of deceptively tranquil antiquity . . . – the fear of the future answered with a self-immolating flight to the loathsome past.”³⁰ Helen is an “abstraction,” the rationale that the Greeks sought to wage war on Troy, the pretext for bodily and territorial aggressions.³¹ In Riding’s account, she embodies an antique world, while Cressida is explicitly an expression of the future and modern woman: “Cressida was almost in her time what woman may be in ours.”³² There is a marked contrast between Helen and Cressida, both in appearance and vigor: Helen is elegant and composed, like a statue, while Cressida is dynamic: “[L]ooking at Cressida, one felt set up in one an excitement of anticipation – what would she do now, what would she say? Helen always looked the same; Cressida, never.”³³ Cressida does not take romantic love as seriously as Helen for such attachments lead to “forgetfulness” and stasis;³⁴ instead, Cressida claims, “I take a lot of other things more seriously. What I take more seriously than anything else in the world is *change*. Change of fortune, change of feelings and ideas.”³⁵ Through Cressida’s emphasis on dynamism and “change,” Riding highlights several core values of modernist aesthetics; in her contrast of the conventional and modern woman she illustrates what late nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminists were calling the New Woman.

After a difficult battle with many injuries and losses, the Greeks and Trojans agree on a truce. As it is customary for each side to send an official hostage to secure the arrangement, Cressida resolves to volunteer for the service out of allegiance to Troy and for the opportunity to reconcile with her father. Cressida proposes her idea to Priam who then authorizes her role during a court ceremony. Thus, in Riding’s version of the story, the act of going over to the Greek camp is done of Cressida’s own free will as opposed to her hapless guise in earlier narratives. The Greek hero Diomedes is the man Calchas has chosen for Cressida to marry and, once reunited with her father in the Greek camp, Cressida realizes that it is a sound choice: “She was curious to see Diomedes. Her father would have chosen carefully among the Greeks for

30 Riding (1937b), 266–7. The gods in Riding’s story have shadowy presences, unquestioned in terms of setting legendary events into motion – like Helen’s falling in love with Paris and their subsequent elopement. Later outcomes, however, are according to human instigation and intervention.

31 Riding (1937b), 266.

32 Riding (1937b), 410.

33 Riding (1937b), 92.

34 Riding (1937b), 214.

35 Riding (1937b), 42–3.

her – not because he was a loving father, or an instinctively accurate judge of character, but because his fear of his daughter made him able to anticipate her opinions: there is no fear so prophetic as that which children have the power to inspire in their parents.”³⁶ (The religious apparatus of Classical legend is missing in *A Trojan Ending*, and with the word “prophetic” Riding jabs at the Classical divinatory tradition, suggesting, rather, that prophesizing is the ploy of self-interest and survival.) Diomedes is Troilus’s antithesis: brave, modest, and observant of Cressida’s wishes instead of clingy and demanding:

Diomedes, in his first look at her, seemed to have an instantaneous perception of all her difficulties. Although her father had chosen him for her husband, there was no suggestion of a formal prerogative in his behaviour; his manner toward her revealed only a concern on her own account.³⁷

While a hostage in the Greek camp, Cressida becomes a confidant of Achilles and she understands the implications of the preparations for the wooden horse. She returns to the Trojan palace following the truce, however, she has decided to go back to the Greek camp to join Diomedes when it is clear to her that the Trojan end is near. She believes it is her role to survive in order to preserve the history and culture of Troy following its destruction and its populations’ dispersion. Priam, Helen, Paris, Cassandra, and Hector all accept her decision and see its wisdom.³⁸ Not so Troilus. During her last evening in the palace, Troilus erupts in a vitriolic display of blame for Cressida’s departure and her refusal of his impositions:

It is not Troy that Cressida is betraying – there’s scarcely a Troy left to betray . . . I can’t let this pass without declaring openly that her going is an act of spite against me. Why? Because I grew tired of her lofty pose and demanded that she treat me as a man instead of as a companion in intellectual ecstasies. It’s what any man has a right to demand of the woman he loves.³⁹

By evening’s end, however, Troilus’s emotional weakness and dependency are displayed when he crumples at Cressida’s feet beseeching forgiveness, even

36 Riding (1937b), 160.

37 Riding (1937b), 162.

38 Riding (1937b), 231: “Cressida was to them a grown-up woman; it was right that she should leave them for a long life.”

39 Riding (1937b), 239.

urging Priam to “sue for peace” and to offer the Greeks “a few colonies” in order to keep Cressida from leaving Troy.⁴⁰ By means of Troilus’ demands Riding demonstrates an old argument for male privilege and sexual entitlement over women, and it is this ‘antique’ paradigm of women’s social submission that Riding works to dismantle. Moreover the contrast is clear: Troilus’ cravings for romance trump his allegiance to Troy, unlike Cressida’s commitment to carry the Trojan legacy forward. By reconfiguring Cressida’s relationship with Troilus, Riding has inverted the Troilus and Cressida narrative as inherited through literary tradition, and she suggests new grounds for relationships between women and men, with an emphasis on women’s choice and agency.

In the final chapter, Cressida returns to the Greek camp under Achilles’ protection, Troy falls before the Greek soldiers secreted in the wooden horse, and Troilus is fatally injured when he charges Diomedes and is shot by Philoctetes’s arrow. Honorably, Diomedes assists Helen in trying to revive Troilus, but for naught. At novel’s end, Riding’s narrator refuses to opine on Cressida’s fate and thereby seals her new version of the legend with this conclusion: “What happened to Cressida after she left . . . with Diomedes no tale tells; nor dare we invent a tale to fill the gap . . . [W]e close the book and quiet our minds; this is as Cressida would have wished.”⁴¹

The Trojan War cycles have served as origin stories for many Western nations. In a forthcoming article, “Trojan Pasts, Medieval Presents: Epic Continuation in Eleventh to Thirteenth Century Genealogical Histories,” Adam J. Goldwyn examines early attempts by medieval founders of European states to create a “Trojan genealogical history” in order to assert dynastic connection to Trojan heroes following the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire.⁴² Goldwyn demonstrates how commissioned historiographies, such as Dudo of St. Quentin’s *Gesta Normanorum* (History of the Normans), Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*, and Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, advanced textual claims for conquered territories by linking an “idealized founder-hero/king” to the Trojan past, alongside some artful exonerations for Troy’s defeat.⁴³ Such narratives

graft the story of the Trojan diaspora onto the existing tradition of heroic literature (such as the Galfridian combination of the Trojan Brutus with the local traditions of Merlin and Arthur) and, also like Geoffrey [of

⁴⁰ Riding (1937b), 250.

⁴¹ Riding (1937b), 432. Henryson’s epilogue be damned.

⁴² Goldwyn (forthcoming).

⁴³ Goldwyn (forthcoming), 18.

Monmouth], use the false but plausible etymologies derived from phonetic similarity between place names and Trojan heroes to join the two traditions.⁴⁴

Goldwyn also establishes how medieval historiographies were fashioned to rhetorically model Virgil's *Aeneid* to further emphasize the Classical heritage.

Riding, too, recognizes the cultural work of legends: "The truth of the Trojan legends is to be measured by the insistence of their claim on our attention, regardless of our lack of compatible historical details . . . Legends are themselves neither truth nor falsehood; they represent invitations to knowledge."⁴⁵ Just as the classics offered European founders a pedigree in the accomplishments of ancient Mediterranean empires, so the resurrection of Cressida serves Riding as an origin tale. Indeed, Riding's project aligns with the established genre of historiography, as historically-situated fictive constructs. *A Trojan Ending* submits what was missing from Cressida's story and in the process advances a forceful progenitor for the modern/modernist woman. The New Woman, like the New Troy, rises from the ashes of a conquered population and thereby inaugurates an alternative history and more progressive and inclusive perspectives. Further, *A Trojan Ending* recasts the conflict between the Trojans and Greeks to parallel Cressida's conflict with Troilus, as well as to praise Trojan culture: the Greeks are described as "inconsistent" and unable to "understand the feeling of shame; the consequences of a deed" – not unlike the stereotypes pressed upon the inconstant Cressida character in Medieval and Renaissance depictions;⁴⁶ the Trojans, on the other hand, are "orderly-minded" and "always try to see things as they really are" – very much in line with Riding's characterization of Cressida.⁴⁷ The novel underscores that Troy is ruled by the powerful Anatolian mother goddess Cybele, "a thoroughly Trojan institution, while the Sun Cult was distinctly Greek in tone."⁴⁸ Cybele is egalitarian in her broad representation of women and economic classes.⁴⁹ According to one male acolyte, Othryoneus the Hittite: "One's feelings for a female god are, somehow, so much more loving than for a male god. Cybele

44 Goldwyn (forthcoming), 13. Galfridus Monemutensis was Geoffrey of Monmouth's authorial name.

45 Riding (1937b), xx.

46 Riding (1937b), 147. Other characterizations of the Greeks can be found on 67, 169, 177, 196–7, 227–8.

47 Riding (1937b), 196, 76.

48 Riding (1937b), 6.

49 Riding (1937b), 11.

was the original goddess of our native Hittite stock.... Of all our gods she alone remains with us in our dispersion."⁵⁰ While mother-goddess-ruled Troy is destroyed by the Zeus-dominated Greeks, Riding submits that in the coming diaspora, Trojan culture will be carried to Britain by "the other Brutus" who, she claims, was the "great-grandson of Scamandrius, Hector's son... [and] not Brutus the great-grandson of Aeneas."⁵¹ Trojan Brutus will found New Troy, later named London, "by the Thames, which had the well-mixed taste of home."⁵² Had Troy triumphed over the Greeks, Riding suggests, the Cybele cult might well have permeated Western civilization. Even so, Cybele-precepts live on through Cressida's survival, as well as in the Trojan dispersion, and Cressida states that this continuity is part of her decision to leave Troy before its destruction:

If this had not happened to Troy, I think that one day, there, by the power of Cybele, we should have come to know the meaning of women. For what is Cybele herself, if not the sum of women? [...] Yes; I left Troy as much for my own sake as for the sake of living on to remember Troy – the real Troy. In Cybele's as well as in Troy's name.⁵³

Just as European states were authorized on the grounds of Trojan inheritance, so too Riding is explicit in identifying Cressida as the defiant carrier of the woman-centered Cybele cult to Greece and beyond.⁵⁴

50 Riding (1937b), 142. Riding develops her theories on women and men in other texts, including *Anarchy Is Not Enough* and *The Word Woman*.

51 Riding (1937b), 414.

52 Riding (1937b), 420. Why Riding sets a claim to Hector's lineage over Aeneas' – countering the genealogy in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Sir Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and others – might have been to create an even more direct link for the British to King Priam.

53 Riding (1937b), 322.

54 At several junctures in the novel, Riding develops the figuration of woman as home and homeland. For example, when Cressida chooses to leave Troy as its destruction is imminent, she does so to preserve its memory in the face of Greek victory. By rejecting Troilus, she not only remains true to her own feelings but chooses love of culture and homeland above love for a man. When Troilus pleads for Cressida to return his love, he claims that by "belonging" to her, he will become "someone." She responds:

'You can't do it simply by making yourself belong to me rather than to your family – that's not being free.'

'Yes, I can, because you're free. You could let me breathe the air you breathe.'

'The air I breathe is the air of Troy... You speak as if I were some new country to go to.'

'You are!' (56–7)

History is, of course, written by the conquerors and, as Goldwyn demonstrates, presents a partial record, often fictive, of origins and events. In her novel's preface, Riding states: "We must think of the *Iliad*, and other epic reports of the Trojan War on which subsequent 'ancient authors' based their accounts, as the rare, dilatory newspapers of their time."⁵⁵ Through *A Trojan Ending*, Riding challenges the veracity of historical record and for that reason the Greek and Trojan court scribes, the amanuenses of events, hold a prominent role in the novel. Cressida anticipates the disparate reports of her decision to leave Troy that will be given by the Trojan scribe Dares and the Greek Dictys: Dares will call hers a "shamed name," while from the Greek camp Dictys will claim that by abandoning Troy "her fortunes gained a new birth among us." Cressida accepts, as the cost for her decision, that "[p]oets would revile her . . . Her name would corrupt; she would be a leper among names."⁵⁶ Several other plot lines in the novel work to dramatize the biases of scribal documents: For example, Odysseus is portrayed as an opportunistic character, "a merchant of adventure," who strategizes to insure that his reputation will be epic-worthy.⁵⁷ In one scene Dictys, chief recorder of battles, accuses Odysseus of misrepresentation: "You always give a different account of what happened from anyone else, Odysseus."⁵⁸ Later, Odysseus instructs his servant Eurybates to set fire to Dictys' tent, thereby destroying Greek war records.⁵⁹ During the sacking of the Trojan palace, Odysseus plots to find the Trojan scribe Dares' accounts:

Cressida counters that Troilus must find his own happiness through knowledge of himself and his responsibilities. Still, other male protagonists echo this formulation of woman as homeland, as does Achilles in this instance: "A man needs to be close to women, or else he becomes vague and homeless" (194). Riding's preoccupation with the idea of home and homeliness extends to her theory of the novel as a genre: "A novel, whatever its faults, has at least the endearing virtue of homeliness. And it is the homelier aspects of the story of Troy that call for understanding, efforts of understanding; with the spectacular aspects we are all too platitudinously familiar" (xiii).

55 Riding (1937b), xxii.

56 Riding (1937b), 215.

57 Riding (1937b), 424.

58 Riding (1937b), 199.

59 Riding (1937b), 364. Odysseus' conniving character is revealed in several passages, like the following: "the meticulous records of Cretan Dictys would have told too much [of his lack of involvement on the battlefield]: this was why he had been obliged to contrive their destruction. (A fire in Dictys' hut, arranged by Eurybates one afternoon when the whole Camp was away at games. Better than stealing the records and being possibly discovered in possession of them, or else burning them in his own hut – in a delicate affair one should use one's own mind but other people's fingers)."

Odysseus' interest in Dares was partly prompted by a desire to get possession of the written records that he had been keeping of the War. More than any other Greek before Troy, Odysseus was anxious about the character that would be given him in the story of the Trojan War, when it began to be told; even because he had played a conspicuous part without doing much actual fighting.⁶⁰

Once inside the Trojan stronghold Odysseus kills Dares and steals his records, while later claiming that Dares had attacked him first. Riding's focus on the politics affecting scribal records pressures the legitimacy of foundational histories – one, in the end, written by human beings to human purposes, as she depicts in Odysseus' attempts to manage his future reputation. Further, by problematizing the canonicity of historical accounts, Riding asks: What genre is history – historiography – but storytelling? Who is to say that past events might not have happened in the way she proposes? After all, powerful men commissioned narratives featuring powerful men; otherwise, how do we account for the marked absence of attention to the lives of historical women? In *A Trojan Ending*, Cressida becomes her own 'authorial' agent by virtue of her choices and actions and thereby inscribes her life's script as well as preserves the memory of her defeated culture (and her values) in an account this is more certainly a "history of ourselves."

The Trojan War, Riding claims, was the inauguration of human record, "the first tight knot that history made in time," the transition from inarticulate to articulate society.⁶¹ Troy's appeal to the modernist imagination was fueled, for one, by the nineteenth-century archeological dig at Hissarlik on the Anatolian peninsula, purported to be the site of ancient Troy and Riding refers to the excavations in her preface.⁶² Further, her location on the island of Mallorca in the Mediterranean Sea presented her with the crumbling settlements of centuries of past empires and invaders, including the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Moors, Christian Catalonians, French, British, and eventually the Spanish. During The Thirties, the siege of Troy was palpable in the garrisoning of soldiers, the civil wars, and revolutions engulfing Europe, Africa, and Asia.

60 Riding (1937b), 363.

61 Riding (1937b), 409.

62 xii: "My own interest in ancient Troy has been rather to discover some consistent story – scheme for the legendary (the personal, the verbal) remains than to ponder over the physical remains – the sherds, the stones, the varied yield of the Hissarlik debris. But my respect for the archaeological ponderers is a warm and grateful one. Without them any modern story of Troy would be a mere literary romance."

By August 1936 Riding and Graves were forced by Francisco Franco's invading Nationalist forces to evacuate their Mallorca home, abandoning their property and papers. According to biographer Elizabeth Friedmann, "On Thursday, July 30, while bombs were exploding in the streets of Palma, Laura finished *A Trojan Ending*."⁶³ The juxtapositions between her world and the Trojan War were obvious and by writing about Troy Riding was "resurrecting its immense experience – as an experience of which we too have our own peculiar need."⁶⁴ For Riding – who would soon undertake an ambitious letter-writing campaign for world peace which was later published in the manifesto-like *The World and Ourselves* (1938) – the Trojans had "had the burden of inaugurating the intelligent world, while we have the burden of arriving at the intelligent conclusions."⁶⁵ Reading Riding, and other understudied women writers, at the intersections of Classical studies, reception studies, and modernist studies reveals a revolutionary mode for reinstatement in its critique of the politics of authorship.

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63 Friedmann (2005), 284. Friedmann was Riding's chosen biographer and she interviewed Riding extensively as well as had access to her letters and personal records.

64 *A Trojan Ending*: Riding (1937b), xi.

65 Riding (1937b) xvi. See Riding et al. (1938).

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Platonic *Eros* and “Soul-Leading” in C. S. Lewis

*Samuel Baker*¹

It's obvious that the soul of every lover longs for something else; his soul cannot say what it is, but like an oracle it has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle.

—PLATO²

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To lose what I owe to Plato and Aristotle would be like the amputation of a limb.

—C. S. LEWIS³

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Introduction

Throughout his corpus, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) argues that we “have a desire that no natural happiness can satisfy.”⁴ In doing so he takes his place within a line of poets, philosophers, and theologians – from Plato to Boethius to Dante and beyond – who have thought the same. While many of these authors influenced Lewis’ understanding of “the Desire,” as he often calls it, I here focus on his creative reception of Plato’s notion of *eros*. Though I believe my investigation will shed light on the account of the Desire and the strategy of “soul-leading” that informs much of Lewis’ work, I limit myself to two somewhat

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- ¹ For comments on an earlier draft of this essay, I thank Alexi Patsaouras and Kevin Meeker.
 - ² These lines come from Aristophanes’ speech in the *Symposium* at 192c7–d2. All translations of Plato come from Cooper (1997), though sometimes with my own alterations.
 - ³ Lewis (2013), 64. Due to space constraints, I discuss only one aspect of the influence of Plato and will ignore the influence of Aristotle.
 - ⁴ Lewis (1996), 30.

early works: the sermon-essay “Weight of Glory” (1941), and the novel-length allegory *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933) with its later added “Preface” (1943).⁵

My discussion proceeds as follows. After outlining (in sec. 2) what Lewis considers to be two distinguishing features of the Desire – its peculiar feel and its peculiar object – I show (in sec. 3) how in the overarching plot and in one key episode of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* Lewis combines material from the *Symposium* and *Republic* in order to describe how the Desire can attach itself to various false objects. Noting (in sec. 4) how Lewis and Plato describe the feel of the Desire quite similarly, I argue (in sec. 5) that in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and in the “Weight of Glory” Lewis attempts to “lead souls” in much the same way that Socrates attempts to “lead souls” in the charioteer speech from the *Phaedrus*. In short, by drawing on his analysis of the Desire and his sensitivity to its feel, Lewis aims both to arouse the Desire within his readers and to shepherd that Desire towards its proper object – which is “eternal life in the vision of God,” correctly understood.⁶ Finally (in sec. 6), I explain why Lewis thought that in order to cultivate the Desire one needed to resist various modernist movements of his day.

Two Distinguishing Features of the Desire

Lewis converted to Christianity at the age of thirty-three and about two years later he wrote *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933), which is a quasi-autobiographical, yet allegorical, account of a young man’s journey to faith. The main character, John, grows up in the town of Puritania, which symbolizes a legalistic and somewhat muddled Christianity. However, he leaves the town at a young age because he is frustrated at not being able to keep the town’s rules but more importantly because he has a confusing experience of intense longing. That experience begins by gazing through a hole in a wall onto a field of primroses and ends with the vision of an island that he longs to find. This awakened Desire moves John to begin and to continue on his journey. However, along the way, he meets various characters who try to persuade him to end his quest on the grounds that the Desire is not worth caring about, that it should be indulged only in moderation, or that the Desire is in fact for something near at hand – most commonly, sex. Despite being briefly persuaded by these characters, John slowly realizes that it is this Desire that makes him want to go on living, and that it is for something beyond

5 Lewis (2014) includes marginal notes by Downing as well as previously unpublished, handwritten, marginal notes by Lewis. All references to *The Pilgrim’s Regress* are to this edition, and I will indicate whether I am referring to marginal notes or not.

6 Lewis (1996), 27.

this world – indeed, that the island was only a picture of the Desire's proper object.⁷ He progresses from "popular realism" to Philosophical Idealism; from Idealism to Pantheism; from Pantheism to Theism, and from Theism to Christianity.⁸ Once John becomes a Christian he travels back over the land he has just passed through, but this time he sees it for what it really is. In place of the characters that he earlier met, he now sees shadows or the monstrous spirits that controlled those characters.

Though John's peculiar "experience of longing" is central to the plot of *The Pilgrim's Regress*, many readers did not understand what Lewis was talking about. This led him to include in the third edition (1943) a new "Preface"⁹ in which he identified two features that he thought distinguished this experience of longing from every other. First, though it is painful, it is also "felt to be somehow a delight" – indeed, unlike every other desire, this Desire is felt to be delightful even when one supposes that it could never be satisfied.¹⁰ Second, the Desire has an elusive object. Though the poetry of William Morris, memories of our own past, and "the sound of ducks flying overhead" (etc.) may arouse the Desire, it is not *for* any of these. Indeed, careful inspection reveals that it is actually for something that "cannot even be imagined as given in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience."¹¹ Lewis supposes that the only plausible candidate for such an otherworldly object would be heaven, that is, eternal life in the vision of God.¹²

Lewis often speaks, just as I have, of an "experience of longing" and of a "Desire," and many commentators identify the two.¹³ However, I believe that the identification is indefensible, and that we can charitably assume Lewis does not intend to make it. It is implausible because one can have a desire without experiencing that desire's feel. For example, a child may desire to go to Disneyland (and it may be true to say that she desires to go) even when she does not feel that desire at all – when she is diligently doing her math homework or even when she is asleep. However, if she watches *Frozen* or sees a picture of Disneyland, this may arouse her desire with the result that she now feels it vividly. We should also charitably assume that Lewis does not intend to

7 Lewis (2014), 152–61.

8 Lewis (2014), 207.

9 The "Preface" was eventually changed to an "Afterward" in the Eerdmans's illustrated edition of 1981. It is also listed as an "Afterward" in the Wade Annotated Edition of 2014.

10 Lewis (2014), 210; cf. 184.

11 Lewis (2014), 212.

12 Lewis (1996), 27. Cf. Lewis (2014), 212.

13 Lewis also sometimes uses the words "Sehnsucht" and "Joy" (capitalized) to describe the experienced Desire. But he does not make any important use of these terms in the works that we will be considering, and so I will not be using them.

make the identification because he makes several claims that are in tension with it: for example, he assumes the experience can come and go,¹⁴ but also that the Desire is always with us – even “on our deathbeds.”¹⁵ For these reasons, then, I shall distinguish in what follows between the Desire, on the one hand, and the “experience of longing,” in which one vividly feels the Desire, on the other. It will be helpful to observe this distinction when we discuss the strategy of “soul-leading.”

Platonic *Eros* and the “Dialect of Desire”: *Symposium* and *Republic*

In constructing *The Pilgrim's Regress* Lewis creatively combines elements from Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*, and in doing so appears to reason as something of a Platonist. One can see this in the overarching plot in which John engages in a “Dialect of Desire,” and in several episodes on the journey, particularly one in which John abandons the Freudian view that the Desire is really a kind of “sublimated lust.”

The *Symposium* allegedly recounts a famous drinking party where all of the participants – Socrates, Aristophanes and Agathon among others – gave speeches in praise of *Eros*. The term “*eros*” at that time seems to have primarily denoted both a Greek god and sexual desire either between men and women or between men and adolescent boys, but Socrates also uses the term in his speech to label a Desire for a divine sort of happiness – possessing the good forever – which can only be attained when gazing on the Form of Beauty itself. For present purposes, I will focus on two elements of Socrates' speech: the “parentage” of *Eros* and the ascent to Beauty for which *eros* is required. With regard to his parentage, *Eros* is the child of Resource (*Ponos*), who is immortal, and Poverty (*Penia*), who is mortal. *Eros* is thus partly immortal and partly mortal (203d8–e1): because he is the child of Poverty, he is always poor, “shoeless and homeless” (203d1), but because he is the child of Resource, he is “brave, impetuous and intense” and a wily “schemer after the beautiful and the good” (203d4–5). Given his hybrid nature, he is neither rich nor poor: though he acquires things, he always loses what he acquires (203d3–5).

This description of *Eros*' parentage becomes clearer when Socrates describes a program by which someone might progressively make his way up to vision of the Form of Beauty itself. We learn that all people desire happiness, which is possessing the good forever (206a11–12), and so all desire “immortality”

14 Lewis (2014), 12: “But he was too young . . . and too empty, now that the unbounded sweetness had passed away, not to seize greedily at whatever it had left behind.”

15 Lewis (1977), 117.

(ἀθανασία, 207a3). Nevertheless, because mortal nature cannot become immortal, it approximates immortality by reproduction, and it reproduces in the presence of beauty (206b7–8).¹⁶ Some men, who are more “pregnant in body” than in soul, are drawn to beautiful women, and so reproduce by having biological children.¹⁷ Other men, who are more pregnant in soul than in body, are drawn to beautiful boys, and so must reproduce in some other way – by writing works of literature, performing virtuous deeds, educating the young, etc. It is the latter sort of man who may be suitable to make the ascent to Beauty itself. To do so, he must first devote himself to a single beautiful body, but then after realizing that the beauty contained in a single body is akin to that of every other beautiful body, he should devote himself to the beauty found in all bodies (210a8–b6). After this, the lover should see that souls are much more valuable than bodies, and consequently must devote himself to beautiful souls. This should in turn lead him to love beautiful customs, laws, then forms of knowledge, and progressively more universal forms of knowledge until he finally catches a glimpse of Beauty itself. The ascent is summarized as follows:

This is what it is to go aright, or to be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful subjects, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know that which is [truly] Beautiful (211b7–d1).

This ultimate Beauty is not sometimes beautiful and sometimes not, nor is it beautiful in relation to one thing but ugly in relation to another; rather, it is always and in every way beautiful and all other beautiful things are beautiful because they “share in” the Beauty itself (210e6–211b5). And we read that it is there, if anywhere, that a man should live his life, “beholding Beauty itself” (211d1–3).

16 As Cooper (1997) says in a footnote to *Symposium* 206b7–8 (“It [the object of love] is giving birth in beauty”), the preposition translated by ‘in’ “is ambiguous between ‘within’ and ‘in the presence of.’” I here assume it means (at least primarily) “in the presence of.”

17 The discussion is largely restricted to men. However, it is worth noting that Socrates prominently cites Alcestis (a woman) as someone who pursues immortality through virtuous action (208d1–6).

Of the ascent to the Form of Beauty itself, three features must be noted. First, the above quotation appears to indicate that it would be incorrect to say that the lover starts off with a love for a beautiful body, which is then replaced by a love for all beautiful bodies, which is then replaced for a love for beautiful customs, and so on. Instead, the lover is drawn to Beauty itself – that is, he in some sense loves Beauty itself – from the very beginning.¹⁸ Second, though he has a love of Beauty, he is *confused* about the object of the love and mistakenly attaches himself to objects that are not Beauty itself. His confusion is at least partly due to the fact that when he sees beautiful objects he experiences a kind of double vision: they are beautiful and not beautiful. They are beautiful insofar as they participate in Beauty itself, but they are not beautiful insofar as they are not Beauty itself. This predicament explains, it seems, why *Eros* is poor but wily, always finding but always losing what he finds: he finds various things that do share in the beautiful but loses what he finds insofar as what he truly seeks is Beauty itself. Finally, the ascent narrative suggests that *eros* itself can act as a “leader” towards Beauty itself (210a7). Because the lover desires Beauty itself from the beginning, he can make progress in understanding what his Desire is for insofar as he seeks to understand why some things arouse the Desire and why some things come closer to satisfying it than others.

The ascent in the *Symposium* is reflected in the plot of *The Pilgrim's Regress*. In his preface Lewis makes clear that the object of John's Desire is – from the very beginning – the enjoyment of God in heaven. However, John is clearly confused about what the proper object of his Desire really is, and throughout his journey he embraces many “false objects” in pursuit of it. Yet John's Desire actually enables him to progressively ascend to God insofar as it leads him to seek out what might be the proper object of the Desire. This peculiar investigation Lewis labels the “dialectic of Desire.”¹⁹

Though there is excellent reason to think that Plato's *Symposium* deeply and directly influenced Lewis in writing *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the Platonic

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- 18 Does the lover desire Beauty itself or the activity of possessing Beauty through contemplation? Because Plato makes it clear that the desire is for happiness, presumably Plato should say something like the latter. However, Aristotle seems to think that this was a genuine point of confusion, and thus criticizes Plato at *Nicomachean Ethics* I 6, 1096b32–35.
- 19 Lewis (2014), 212. Downing characterizes the Dialectic of Desire as a kind of trial and error process. That is presumably partly due to the way that Lewis himself talks about it in the “Preface.” However, it must be more than a trial and error process because it requires the seeker to ask relevant philosophical and explanatory questions. We will see an example of such questions in the latter part of this section.

influence that Lewis explicitly acknowledges is that of the *Republic*.²⁰ He does this in two prominent places: in the epitaphs that begin the novel's first and last books.²¹ A translation of *Republic* VI, 505e1–4 serves as an epitaph for the first book:

This every soul seeketh and for the sake of this doth all her actions, having an inkling that it is; but what it is she cannot sufficiently discern, and she knoweth not her way and concerning this she hath no constant assurance as she hath of other things.²²

The character Socrates is here speaking of "the Good," which is the source of all goodness. It is this that every soul desires, while having a dim knowledge *that* it is and an even weaker knowledge *what* it is. (It is not clear what exactly the connection is between the Form of the Good and the Form of Beauty itself. For our purposes, we can treat them as more or less identical.) Plato explains that the guardians of the republic must have a more robust knowledge of the Good than the commoners, and this requires them to undergo a long and difficult education – figuratively depicted in his famous allegory of the cave (*Republic* VII, 514a1–517a7).

The ascent in this allegory runs as follows. In a cave deep inside the earth, there are prisoners chained such that they can only see shadows cast on the wall in front of them. Behind the prisoners is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners there is road along which people carry above their heads various artifacts – sculptures of humans and other animals. The shadows only come from the artifacts because there is a wall that blocks the shadows of the people themselves. The prisoners take these shadows of the artifacts to be reality – for example, calling a "horse" what is in fact the shadow of statue of a horse. However, one day a prisoner is freed and compelled to leave the cave. Once he reaches the outside world, his eyes have not adjusted to the light and so

20 We will soon consider direct evidence of the *Symposium*'s influence, but I here note that a few years before Lewis wrote *The Pilgrim's Regress* he wrote a now lost work entitled "Moving Image," which he describes as follows: "If you take the *Symposium*, *Phantastes*, and *Tristram Shandy*, and stir them up all together you will about have the recipe." Lewis (2004), 909.

21 Lewis (2014), 20 also includes another Platonic quotation as an epitaph to Book 2 – an excerpt from Plato's second purported letter to Dionysius II. Whatney (2006), 182–4 also finds the influence of the *Republic* in Lewis' early long poem *Dymer* (1929).

22 As Downing (2014), 5 notes this is very probably Lewis' own translation and the word "inkling" may be an allusion to the intellectual club of which Lewis and Tolkien were a part.

he must begin by seeing images of things in water, and then plants, animals and other things, and finally the sun itself (which symbolizes the Form of the Good). We also hear that if a man who has once gazed on the Form of the Good were compelled to re-enter the cave, his eyes would be poorly adjusted to the shadows and the prisoners would suppose that his journey did him no good. (Lewis' second quotation from the *Republic* refers to this episode).²³ However, once their eyes adjust to the darkness, they can see even the shadows better than those imprisoned in the cave.

Here, briefly, is how I understand Lewis to have combined the ascents of the *Symposium* and the *Republic* and to have created a new but still highly Platonic story. From the ascent in the *Symposium*, Lewis takes three key ideas: that humans possess a Desire for an other-worldly and divine object, that the Desire is often not attached to its proper object, and that the Desire can serve as a kind of leader towards its proper object insofar as one attends to what arouses the Desire and to what comes closer to satisfying the Desire. From the ascent in the *Republic*, Lewis also takes three key ideas: that the ascent is a movement from illusion to reality, that in the lower stages of the ascent one is often the victim of external manipulation, and that one's own ignorance of reality is a kind of prison.²⁴ Though Lewis would certainly disagree with Plato on important points, he nevertheless seems to read Plato as someone who is in deep agreement with core Platonic doctrines and who takes the Platonic dialogues to present roughly the same philosophical picture from different angles. That is, Lewis reads Plato as a kind of Platonist.²⁵ I believe Lewis' synthesizing of the two ascents suggests as much, but to recommend this thesis a bit more, I will discuss a memorable passage from *The Pilgrim's Regress*, but one that has so far not received any discussion.

23 "And if, when he returned into the cave, he were constrained once more to contend with those that had always there been prisoners, in judgment of the said shadows, would they not mock them, and say of him that by going up out of the cave he had come down again with his eyes marred for his pains, and that it was lost labour for any so much as to try that ascent." Lewis (2014), 179 here abridges *Republic* VII 516e2–517a4.

24 I should note that the idea of the ascent being a movement from illusion to reality is partly present in the *Symposium*, just as the Desire for the greatest Good is present in the *Republic*, but in neither case is it a central part of the respective story.

25 I am of course not the first person to note the influence of Plato on Lewis – see, for example, Matthews, (2005), 169–79, who discusses Lord Digory's comment that "It's all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what *do* they teach them at these schools!" in Lewis (1956), 212. However, I believe Lewis' serious engagement with Plato has yet to be fully appreciated, and on this project I aim to make modest progress.

During the first half of John's journey, he finds himself 'trespassing' through the land of Zeitgeistheim. There Sigismund Enlightenment²⁶ has just thrown John into a prison guarded by the "Spirit of the Age." This imprisonment largely consists in Sigismund Enlightenment and the giant Spirit of the Age having convinced John that his Desire is really a sublimated desire for sex.²⁷ Because John has often mistaken his Desire for the desire for sex – for example, in the forest with the "brown girls,"²⁸ with Media Halfways,²⁹ etc. – John was somewhat easily convinced. What concerns us, though, is the way John escapes from the prison and from the land of the Zeitgeist. He escapes by the arguments of Reason (that is, John's own reason), which is depicted as a woman clad in armor and riding on a horse. She asks three riddles to the "Spirit of the Age," and because the giant cannot answer, he crumbles, thereby allowing John to escape. Reason's last riddle seems to be the most important: "By what do you tell a copy from an original?" When John later says that he did not understand this, Reason explains: "one is the copy of the other but which is the copy of which."³⁰ The idea is that the Freudians are correct to notice a similarity between the desire for sex and the Desire for heaven, but they are wrong about which is the original and which is the copy.

The Platonic thought behind this last riddle is candidly expressed in a letter written to Arthur Greeves several months before Lewis converted to Christianity and three years before he published *The Pilgrim's Regress*. At this point in the letter, Lewis has just reported a vivid and sensual experience of the Desire, which he speculates is partly due to an extraordinarily long period of chastity and self-control. He then remarks:

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- 26 Explaining "Sigismund Enlightenment" in a marginal note, Lewis (2014), 49 writes, "Psychoanalysis and the type of thought that goes with it have replaced nineteenth century materialism (old Mr. Enlightenment) as the chief antitheistic force". Here one can note that Freud (1989), 733 in *Civilization and its Discontents* writes: "The love of beauty seems a perfect example of an impulse inhibited in its aim. 'Beauty' and 'attraction' are originally attributes of the sexual object."
- 27 This episode depicts what Lewis considered to be one of the two main attacks on the Desire. See my last section: "Modernists and the Desire."
- 28 Lewis (2014), 16–20. Downing's marginal note at 17 argues that the adjective "brown" was not intended to have racial overtones.
- 29 Lewis (2014), 34. In a handwritten, marginal note, Lewis (2014), 30 explains "Media Halfways" as "The bad, semi-erotic kind of Romanticism – halfway between mere animalism and a real form of spiritual experience and ready to lead you the whole way to one if you don't make her lead you the whole way to the other."
- 30 Lewis (2014), 60.

One knows what a psychoanalyst would say – it is sublimated lust, a kind of defeated masturbation which fancy gives one to compensate for external chastity. Yet after all, why should that be the right way of looking at it? If he can say that It is sublimated sex, why is it not open to me to say that sex is underdeveloped *It?* – as Plato would have said. And if as Plato thought, the material world is a copy or mirror of the spiritual, then the central feature of the material life (= sex), must be a copy of something in the Spirit: and when you get a faint glimpse of the latter, of course you find it like the former: an Original is like its copy: a man is like his portrait.³¹

Lewis begins this passage by noting how a Freudian might explain the extraordinary experience that he has just reported: it is sublimated sex or a sublimated desire for sex.³² Then Lewis proposes an alternative explanation and one he thinks Plato would have agreed with: perhaps sex is an underdeveloped form of “It.” Lewis is presumably thinking of the *Symposium*, where in the early rungs of the lover’s ascent he has a Desire for Beauty that is mistakenly oriented towards beautiful bodies. Indeed, at this stage it may very well look like the lover just has a desire for sex. Lewis then cites another Platonic thought – that the material world is a copy of the spiritual world – and something like this thought most clearly derives from the *Republic*, where Plato describes the sensible world as a kind of copy of a heavenly intelligible world. On the basis of this thought Lewis augments his earlier characterization of the desire for sex being an undeveloped form of “It.” He suggests, that if the material world is a copy of the spiritual world, then the central feature of material life, which he understands to be sex, must be a faint imitation of something in the spiritual world. This latter “something” is presumably the experience of the satisfied Desire, of which Lewis’s current experience of longing is only a foretaste or “faint glimpse.” And so Lewis ends up affirming a very Platonic thought – though one never articulated by Plato – and he seems to do so by reasoning as something of a Platonist.

31 Letter to Arthur Greeves, January 30th, 1930, as included in Lewis (2004), 878.

32 Lewis is not careful with his language here. He begins by talking of “sublimated lust” (i.e. desire for sex) and then talks of “sublimated sex.” Likewise, when he speaks of “It,” that sometimes seems to refer to the experience of the Desire and sometimes to the experience of the Desire satisfied. I do not know the reason for this lack of care, but here are two thoughts. First, perhaps Lewis here has not yet fully learned the lesson, emphasized by Lewis (1955), 220–1, that the experience is not an end in itself but necessarily for the sake of something else. Second, perhaps his lack of care is due to the fact that “sweet Desire cuts across our ordinary distinction of wanting and having. To have it is, by definition, a want: to want it, we find, is to have it” (2014), 210.

The *Feel* of the Desire³³

As we earlier noted, Lewis describes the feel of the Desire as a pleasant yet painful experience of intense longing for an elusive object. Four features are now worth distinguishing. First, the Desire is a mixture of pleasure and pain. Though it is "sweet," it "pierces us like a rapier."³⁴ Second, because "this hunger is better than any other fullness," the aroused Desire involves intense longing. Third, the object of the Desire is elusive: though objects in this life can trigger a vivid experience of the Desire, its proper object is other-worldly. Fourth, due to the three previous features, the experience of the Desire is – at least initially – confusing.³⁵

Plato describes the feel of *eros* similarly in Socrates' speech from the *Symposium* and especially in Socrates' famous "charioteer" speech in the *Phaedrus*.³⁶ Socrates delivers the latter speech in order to persuade Phaedrus, a beautiful young man enamored of speeches, to pursue the philosophical life. Socrates narrates how before birth the soul had wings, which enabled it to fly in the company of gods around the edges of the universe gazing on various divine Forms – of Wisdom, Beauty, Goodness, etc. – experiencing a divine kind of happiness (246e6–248b5 and 250b1–c6). However, for some not totally clear reason, the soul lost its wings, and consequently, descended to earth, took on a body, and forgot about its extraordinary past. Though all human souls have seen a glimpse of the divine Forms, some are much more inclined to recollect than others. When those who are not inclined to recollect see a beautiful body, they are consumed by lust. When those who are inclined to recollect see a beautiful body, they have a more complex experience: "They are startled when they see an image of what they saw up there. Then they are beside themselves, and their experience is beyond their comprehension because they cannot fully grasp what it is that they are seeing" (250a6–b1).

The reason the lover finds his experience "beyond [his] comprehension" seems to be as follows. Unlike the other Forms, beauty can be partly received

33 In this and the next section, I trace some important similarities between Plato and Lewis, largely drawing on the *Phaedrus*. However, I should note that in these sections (unlike the previous ones), it is not as easy to find direct evidence of Platonic influence.

34 Lewis (2014), 210–2.

35 As we will see in the next section, Lewis also thinks that one can discern aspects of the desire that one did not initially notice.

36 It is worth noting that two contemporary philosophers, both influenced by Plato, have discussed the Desire's feel in the context of aesthetics: Nehamas (2007) and Sartwell (2004).

through the senses, and so seeing a beautiful object can prompt the lover to recollect his earlier vision of the Form of beauty. This recollection, in turn, awakens in him an intense longing – a longing not immediately transparent to the lover – but which is in fact a longing to return to the company of the gods and gaze on the Form of the Beautiful and the other divine Forms. This is the elusive, other-worldly object of the lover's *eros*, even though sensible things may indeed arouse it. When the lover gazes on his beloved, the stream of beauty “pours into <the lover> through his eyes” and this “warms him up and waters the growth of his wings” (251b1–3). Growing wings, however, is a painful process:

The stump of each feather is blocked in its desire and it throbs like a pulsing artery while the feather pricks at its passageway, with the result that the whole soul is stung all around, and the pain simply drives it wild – but then, when it remembers the boy in his beauty, it recovers its joy. *From the outlandish mix of these two feelings – pain and joy – comes anguish and helpless raving*: in its madness the lover's soul cannot sleep at night or stay put by day; it rushes, yearning, wherever it expects to see the person who has that beauty (251d3–e3; my emphasis).

As the desire for a divine happiness grows in the lover, this gives rise to a potent mixture of pleasure and pain. The confused lover is in pain insofar as he feels the lack of the heavenly vision, but he feels pleasure insofar as the sight of his beautiful beloved gives him something like a foretaste of that vision.

Besides recording the feel of the aroused Desire, both Plato and Lewis also pay attention to what sorts of language tend to arouse it. In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, Plato catalogues various literary devices that orators have used to inflame, hush, and produce various other effects on the soul (266d–268a). He also notes that these same orators do not really understand what they are doing, and that this is mostly because they do not understand the nature of the soul (268a–269d). As for Lewis, consider Chapter 5 (“Leah for Rachel”) of Book 2 of *The Pilgrim's Regress*, where John visits the house of Mr. Halfways, who represents “the later and weaker followers” of the Romantic Movement in literature.³⁷ The entrancing song of Mr. Halfways arouses John's Desire and leads John to ask Mr. Halfways to repeat his song three times. At the third repetition, however, “John [...] began to see how several of the effects were produced and that

37 This is at least how the hermit “History” describes Mr. Halfways at Lewis (2014), 160.

some parts were better than others."³⁸ It is also clear that Mr. Halfways does not fully understand what he is doing since he mistakenly thinks that the Desire of John's soul can be satisfied in the arms of Media Halfways.³⁹ Lewis communicates some deeper thoughts on the topic in Chapters 8 ("History's Words") and 9 ("Matter of Fact") of Book 8, where we read that God has used different images in different cultures and at different times to arouse the Desire. For example, in the 18th and 19th century, it was the image of nature, which inspired the Romantic Movement.⁴⁰ In medieval Europe, it was the "image of a lady," which inspired the culture of courtly romance.⁴¹ Thus, not only do Plato and Lewis describe the feel of the Desire similarly, but they seem acutely attentive to what sorts of language and images arouse it. And since they both understand the Desire to be for a certainly otherworldly knowledge, they use their knowledge in order to orient it correctly.

Platonic *Eros* and Soul-Leading (*Psychagogia*)

Of the ascent to the Form of Beauty Socrates says that this is "what it is to go aright, *or* to be led by another, into the mystery of Love" (*Symposium* 211b7–c1). There thus seem to be two ways to make the ascent: *either* things can "go aright" on one's own *or* one can be led by another. Plato never explicitly says what conditions would need to be met for a successful pursuit without a guide, but at the very least, one will need to have a natural tendency to ask philosophical questions (seeking, for example, the explanation why some objects come closer to satisfying one's Desire than others), and one will need to have enough self-knowledge to realize when one's *eros* is not in fact satisfied. These conditions, however, are rare and so Socrates seems to think that most people will in fact need a guide or "leader."

What, then, does it take *to lead another* into "the mystery of Love"? The answer to this question is addressed in the latter half of the *Phaedrus*, the greater part of which is devoted to rhetoric, identified by Socrates as "a way of leading the soul (*psychagogia*) by means of speech, not only in the

38 Lewis (2014), 34.

39 Lewis (2014), 34.

40 A handwritten, marginal note by Lewis (2014), 159 reads "Romantic nature poetry: Wordsworth etc."

41 Here it is worth noting that Lewis' first academic book, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), was devoted to the topic of courtly romance; republished in Lewis (2013).

law courts and on other public occasions but also in private" (261a8–9). In short, Plato says that in order to lead a soul by means of speech, one must exercise the powers of both a philosopher and a poet. With regard to philosophy, two things are required. First, one must systematically understand the topic of one's discourse.⁴² Second, one must carefully understand the nature of the soul in general and of specific types of souls. This not only requires understanding that the soul is divided into three parts – a rational part (reason itself) and two non-rational parts (appetite and spirit) – but also how the various dispositions of these parts can create different character types and different states of health or sickness (271a4–b5). With regard to poetry, Plato suggests that one must have some natural facility with words (269d4–6), and that one must be capable of employing various verbal devices that can rouse the listeners to various emotions or desires (266d1–268a1). However, the powers of the poet must be combined with the powers of the philosopher if one is to be an effective soul leader: one will need to know when to arouse the soul, to what extent, in what way, for what purpose, etc. (268a8–269d8). This not only requires knowing one's subject matter but the nature of the soul and thus which soul-types are persuaded by which speeches (271b2–5).

Now even though this account of soul-leading by means of speech reveals that it is a practice that could be used for more than one end, Plato in the *Phaedrus* is particularly interested in the way one might arouse and shepherd a listeners' *eros*. Indeed, in the charioteer speech Socrates engages in soul-leading precisely in order to arouse Phaedrus' *eros* and direct it towards a philosophical life.⁴³ In the speech, Socrates displays the three essential features of a good orator. First, he philosophically understands his subject matter by carefully distinguishing the specific kind of madness (*mania*) that *eros* is (244a1–245c1, 249d4–250d1, etc.). Second, Socrates demonstrates awareness not only of the tripartite structure of the soul (246a3–249c4, etc.), but also the particular character of Phaedrus' soul. Indeed, Socrates suits his speech to Phaedrus' soul, using beautiful language precisely because Phaedrus is himself a lover of speeches. And third, Socrates uses many rhetorical devices and images not only to arouse the *eros* of Phaedrus but to shepherd it towards its appropriate object, which is contemplation of the divine Forms.

42 More accurately, one must understand it by means of a method of division: "[Y]ou must learn how to define each thing in itself; and, having defined it, you must know how to divide it into kinds until you reach something indivisible." (277b6–8).

43 I will not argue for this in any detail, though I think it is fairly clear from the text. For an argument, however, see Moss (2012).

Socrates does this by describing from a broader perspective the Desire at work in a lover's soul.

So how does soul-leading figure in Lewis' work? Many authors – including Wordsworth, Morris, MacDonald, Chesterton, Tolkien, and Plato himself – played some role in arousing Lewis' Desire and directing it towards its proper object. For example, it was a conversation with Tolkien that dissolved Lewis' opposition to the doctrine of redemption,⁴⁴ and when Lewis reviewed Tolkien's first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, he would seem to recommend it as arousing the Desire: "here are beauties that pierce like swords or burn like cold iron."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Lewis presents his own journey to Christianity as a kind of Dialectic of Desire. In the Preface to *Pilgrim's Regress*, he says that in his pursuit to satisfy the Desire he embraced many various false objects, and "contemplated each of them earnestly enough to discover the cheat."⁴⁶ His understanding in this area came from philosophical reflection on his own "experience."⁴⁷

However, I submit that very often Lewis himself attempts to engage in soul-leading. In the "Preface" to *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis, who was himself trained as a philosopher, shows himself to some extent capable of distinguishing this desire from other desires, as we saw in sections 1 and 3.⁴⁸ Second, he also shows himself aware of the nature of the soul and the ways in which souls of different types or in different ages are impeded from understanding this

44 Lewis (1993), 288 records the conversation in a famous letter to Arthur Greeves on October 18, 1931: "Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself [...] I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it [...] The reason was that in pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant'. Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*."

45 Lewis, (1982), 84. Compare how Lewis (2014), 212 says that the Desire "pierces us like a rapier."

46 Lewis (2014), 211.

47 Lewis (2014), 211.

48 Though Lewis is philosophically informed, he is not always rigorous. For example, Lewis (2014), 212 notes that the object of the Desire is something that cannot be found "in our present mode of spatio-temporal experience," and rather quickly assumes that the object must be the contemplation of God in heaven. There are, however, other possibilities. Aquinas, for example, considers the possibility that our Desire is for the contemplation of angels (*Summa Theologica* I–II 3, vii), which he has reason to think could not be present in our present mode of spatio-temporal experience.

Desire – for example, by Freudianism.⁴⁹ And third, as we saw at the end of the previous section, John's interactions with Mr. Halfways and the Hermit reveal that Lewis is particularly sensitive to what sorts of language and imagery tend to arouse the Desire in different souls and in different ages. Indeed, many of these images are used to describe John's own experience of the Desire.

But it is in the "Weight of Glory" where we find Lewis engaging in a sort of soul-leading most similar to that which we saw in the *Phaedrus*' charioteer speech. For Lewis' "Weight of Glory" is both a discussion of the Desire and a clear attempt to arouse it. Lewis begins by identifying the Desire by its object, which is heaven. He notes and argues against a common misconception that one might have about the Desire: namely, that in order to be guided by it in one's ethical life one would somehow have to be a mercenary affair.⁵⁰ He then delivers a subtle yet lyrical description of how we often misunderstand the Desire when it is aroused, and the passage ends:

These things – the beauty, the memory of our own past – are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.

Immediately after this he adds:

Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years.⁵¹

The above two passages reveal that Lewis has both thought about the condition of his hearers' souls and taken pains to suit his language to their souls in their present condition. He notes that his hearers – unlike others living a hundred or so years earlier – are under an "enchantment of worldliness" and thus they need to have their Desire aroused before it can be directed towards its

49 Here it is perhaps also worth noting that throughout *The Abolition of Man* (1944) Lewis seems committed to a Platonic tripartition of the soul; republished in Lewis (2000).

50 Lewis (1996), 26–7.

51 Lewis (1996), 29.

proper object. Lewis does assume that his hearers have the Desire, but that due to their "enchantment" they have suppressed and misinterpreted it.⁵² Lewis aims to break this enchantment by means of his rhetoric. In the lines before the first passage I quote, he gives alternative interpretations to the longings we experience when we see beauty or remember our own past: he says that they are in fact manifestations of the Desire. He explains that the beauty (of this world) and the memory of our own past "are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited." He is here making use of incantatory repetition as well as a sort of imagery of perceived lack (with possible fullness) in order to arouse the Desire. Lewis even says as much: "Am I trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am." Yet Lewis does not merely aim to arouse the Desire, he also aims to shepherd the Desire towards its proper object, correctly conceived. And this is surely not the only place where Lewis attempts to soul-lead in the way that I have just been outlining. One can discern him doing so in very many of his writings: in his science fiction trilogy, in *The Great Divorce*, in *Surprised by Joy*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and so on. The famous desire to "get into Narnia," for example, is surely a manifestation of the Desire in Lewis' eyes, and Lewis takes pains to direct it to what he considers to be its proper object.⁵³

Because I have mostly noted similarities between Lewis' and Plato's treatments of the Desire, it seems worth ending by pointing out a notable dissimilarity. When Lewis aims to shepherd the Desire in the "Weight of Glory" he focuses on one strand of "imagery" that the Bible uses to describe heaven: namely, that the blessed will have "glory" or "fame." At first, as he notes, this particular image initially made no appeal to him since the desire for fame seemed to him "a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than of heaven."⁵⁴ But once he read how diverse Christians understood "glory" to signify not fame before other men but fame before God, a new way opened up before him to appreciate the authoritative imagery. Just as there can be a rightful pleasure in being praised by one's superior – a dog by a man, or a son by his father – so there is a rightful pleasure in a creature being praised by his Creator. In the beatific

52 Lewis is presumably thinking that a hundred or so years earlier, the Romantic Movement made the experience of the Desire more accessible. See the next section and Lewis (2014), 159.

53 Cf. Lewis (2014), 210: "If [the Desire] comes . . . while he is reading a 'romantic' tale or poem of 'perilous seas and faerie lands forlorn,' he thinks he is wishing that such places really existed and that he could reach them." See also McGrath (2013), especially 290, who perceives the Desire at work in Narnia.

54 Lewis (1996), 32–3.

vision, then, the blessed will look upon God, but God will also look back upon them – with love and approval. Lewis then says that this led him to detect an aspect of his own Desire that he had previously overlooked – something that occurs when the experience of the Desire is dying away. One gets the feeling of somehow being left outside and unnoticed – exiled. And so he concludes, “The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret.”⁵⁵ Here we have a way of thinking of the Desire and its consummation that, while not strictly unplatonic, finds no precedent in Plato. Since the Form of the Good or Form of the Beautiful is not living or intelligent, the platonic beatific vision is coldly impersonal: we may look at the Forms but they do not look back.

Modernists and the Desire

Though one can find modernist strains in Lewis – including his struggle to interpret semi-conscious desires and his sense of something like existential exile – he reasonably understands himself to be anti-modernist and even pre-modern.⁵⁶ Indeed, in *The Pilgrim's Regress* he recoils from the modernist and avant-garde movements of his day precisely because he takes them to be attacking the Desire. In the “Preface,” he explains that at that time there was an attack “from above” and “from below.”⁵⁷ The attack from below was carried out by the Freudians, D. H. Lawrence and others who reduced the desire to, or glorified it as, the desire for sex. We earlier discussed the episode with the Freudians in the land of Zeitgeistheim. John had fled there out of the city of Eschropolis,⁵⁸ where the depiction of Lawrence occurs. In this city, after hearing a salacious song sung by a man wearing “nothing but a red shirt and a cod-piece made of crocodile skins,” John gauchely suggests which impulses the song seems to arouse in the listener. The singer violently replies, “you are not yet able to

55 Lewis (1996), 35–6.

56 For a discussion of modernist themes in Lewis, see Hiley (2011), especially 178–89 and 208–19. For Lewis's self-identification as a pre-modern, see his inaugural lecture as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English Literature at the University of Cambridge, entitled ‘*De Descriptione Temporum*’ in Lewis (2015), 12–4.

57 Lewis (2014), 312.

58 This seems to be Lewis's neologism formed by combining αἰσχροτός (shameful, ugly) and πόλις (city-state).

distinguish art and pornography!' and spits in his face.⁵⁹ Perhaps surprisingly, Lewis also suggests that Gertrude Stein, the surrealists and Dadaists (etc.) participated in the attack 'from below'. After John is spat upon, the tall and thin 'Glugly' gets up, contorts her body and then utters gibberish.⁶⁰ John says he doesn't understand the gibberish, and Glugly's keeper replies, "that is because you are looking for beauty. You are still thinking of your Island. You have got to realize that satire is the moving force in modern music." "The expression of savage disillusionment," adds someone else.⁶¹ After querying too persistently the cause of their disillusionment, he eventually has to flee the city.

According to Lewis, the Desire was also under attack "from above" by the unlikely alliance of American Humanists, Neo-Scholastics, and "those [including T. S. Eliot] who wrote for *The Criterion*." They were united in scorning the Desire as being a kind of lust, escapism, or soft-mindedness.⁶² Lewis depicts them in John's visit to the house of the "Three Pale Men":⁶³ "Mr. Neo-Classical,"⁶⁴ "Mr. Neo-Angular,"⁶⁵ and "Mr. Humanist."⁶⁶ The three lived and ate very austere with no "romantic sauces," spurning all "*Sehnsucht* and *Wanderlust*."⁶⁷ Because they had seen the unfortunate effects of Mr. Halfways (roughly, Romanticism in literature), they disdained him and the Desire altogether. Many years later when Lewis was defending Shelley against some criticisms made by Eliot, he there makes a remark similar to one we read in 'Weight of Glory': "The world is full of impostors who claim to be disenchanted and are really unenchanted."⁶⁸

59 Lewis (2014), 44.

60 In a handwritten marginal note, Lewis (2014), 44 writes, "Try the works of Gertrude Stein or Joyce's *Anna Livia Pluribella* [sic] or the surrealists, Dadaists, etc." Anna Livia Pluribella is a character in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.

61 Lewis (2014), 45.

62 Lewis (2014), 213.

63 A handwritten, marginal note by Lewis reads, "The harsher and also better types of anti-Romanticism such as appear in *The Criterion*." (2014), 94.

64 A handwritten, marginal note by Lewis (2014), 94 reads, "T. S. Eliot flirted with something he called classicism at one time."

65 A handwritten, marginal note by Lewis (2014), 94 reads, "The more venomous type of Anglo-Catholic."

66 A handwritten, marginal note by Lewis (2014), 94 reads, "He can be studied in Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*."

67 Lewis (2014), 95–7.

68 Lewis (2015), 196. This line occurs when Lewis is defending Shelley against a vague criticism often expressed by "the damning epithet 'adolescent'" (196). In the *Use of Criticism and the Use of Poetry* (1994), Eliot says, "The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be ideas of adolescence [...] And an enthusiasm for Shelley seems to me also to be an affair of adolescence" (80). It is also perhaps worth noting that in the "Weight of Glory" Lewis

He no doubt thinks the pervasive unenchantedness of his day is to be expected from an age “almost pathological in its anti-Romanticism.”⁶⁹

Near the end of his life Lewis wrote in his spiritual autobiography that the experience of the Desire was “in a sense the central story of my life.”⁷⁰ Part of what I have done in this essay is to show how Lewis reasons like a Platonist in order to make sense of this peculiar experience. Indeed, it seems to have been in no small degree his earnest, platonic reading of Plato that enabled him to resist the intellectual currents of his day. I have also suggested that in very many of Lewis’s writings he is himself attempting to create the experience of the Desire in his ‘unenchanted’ readers, and then to orient that Desire towards its proper object. If Lewis’s writings have enduring power, as they seem to have, I suspect that is because he is at least partly successful in doing so.

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says that people often take their “revenge on [the Desire] by calling names like Nostalgia, Romanticism, and Adolescence” (28).

69 The phrase is used in Lewis’s review of Tolkien’s *Fellowship of the Ring* Lewis (2013), 99.

70 Lewis (1955), 17.

- Lewis, C. S. (1956) *The Last Battle*. New York: Harper Collins.
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The Heideggerian Origins of a Post-Platonist Plato

William H. F. Altman

A new Plato has emerged in the last hundred years, and Platonism has paid the price for the disillusionment that followed the Great War; this essay considers this transformation in the context of Martin Heidegger. Largely because the lives of so many millions were squandered for no good reason in the First World War, the twentieth-century has not proved hospitable to what were once called “high ideals,” and even when post-War European thinkers like Camus, Sartre, and Heidegger himself embraced a scarcely un-heroic willingness to accept or even embrace death, it was in a manner that very few of those who were killed between 1914 and 1918 would have recognized. The Romantics, Christians, and ancient Greeks had offered the First World Warriors more relevant models, and among the latter, Plato in particular had done so for the well educated. When Socrates compared himself to Achilles during his trial, drowned out the self-preserving counsel of his best friend with the speech of the Athenian laws in *Crito*, and explained immortality in relation to our recollection of a pre-embodied existence in *Phaedo*, he had provided a comprehensive and widely disseminated vision that had made modern war more bearable for those who actually endured its horrors, one that was shared by soldiers on both sides of No-Man’s-Land. But in the aftermath of this otherwise senseless waste of human excellence, the high and often Platonic ideals that had made it possible came under attack for a second time, almost as if they had been responsible for Ypres, Verdun, and Gallipoli. To take but one example: no scholar had ever doubted that Socrates – himself a veteran of foreign wars – was anything less than sincere in *Crito* about his duty to Athens before “the war to end war” created its fraudulent twenty-year armistice.

In order to assess Heidegger’s place in this development, it is necessary to begin with Aristotle. Although Werner Jaeger’s path-breaking study of Aristotle’s development (1923) made a powerful case for the view that the young Aristotle had originally been a Platonist,¹ a certain circularity could be perceived in his argument: the case depended on a vision of Plato’s own development that

1 The original appeared as *Aristoteles; Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923).

Aristotle's own testimony had made possible.² While Jaeger's investigation of the fragmentary remains of Aristotle's dialogues revealed numerous links to Plato, it was not because the young Aristotle had ever embraced the transcendent and unchanging Idea of the Good in the Cave Allegory, for example, that Jaeger could justify his claims about Aristotle's early Platonism. Jaeger's case rested instead on the young Aristotle's embrace of a set of doctrines that – while leaving traces in Plato's late dialogues – were made fully explicit only in Aristotle's own accounts of Plato's views.³ While it is well known that Aristotle attributed to Plato views that are not stated in the dialogues themselves,⁴ the embrace of "Plato's Development" has been so pervasive in the reception of Plato since the nineteenth century that Aristotle's originating role in the creation of "the late Plato" has not been sufficiently emphasized.⁵ In any case, I will use the term "developmentalism" to describe the view that Plato's thought had not only "developed" but had more specifically moved way from the unchanging and transcendent Ideas of traditional Platonism, the ultimate basis of the "high ideals" with which this essay began.

It is important to begin with the Aristotelian basis of developmentalism because it is certainly not because of Heidegger's influence that an attack on traditional Platonism emerged triumphant in the twentieth century as far as the Anglophone reception of Plato is concerned. The "likely story" of Plato's abandonment of "the two-world ontology of the middle period" (or some similar phraseology)⁶ predates Heidegger's birth in 1889,⁷ and it is therefore not Heidegger who is primarily responsible for the emergence of a post-Platonist Plato in the twentieth-century: Aristotle is. The principal merit of emphasizing Aristotle's role in the development of developmentalism from the start is that it suggests a basis for detecting some continuity between the Anglo-American and Continental receptions of Plato, two different streams that converge in a

2 The *fons et origo* is *Metaphysics M4*; 1078b9–12 (translation by W. D. Ross): "Now, regarding the Ideas, we must first examine the ideal theory by itself, not connecting it in any way with the nature of numbers, but treating it in the form in which it was originally understood by those who first maintained the existence of Ideas."

3 See Jaeger (1948), 81–2.

4 Cf. Sayre (2004), 218: "I am convinced that this assumption [sc. 'the undefended assumption that the views attributed to Plato in the *Metaphysics* are nowhere present in Plato's dialogues'] is incorrect."

5 See Ilting (1965), 377–92.

6 A convenient shorthand is "TTF" for "Theory of Transcendent Forms," appearing in Shiner (1974), 22–5.

7 With the foundation laid in Campbell (1867), the most significant early documents are Jackson (1881) 253–98, (1882) 287–331, (1884) 1–40 and (1885) 242–72, (1886) 172–230, 15: 280–305.

shared and Aristotle-inspired end. To put it another way: although it was only on the Continent that Heidegger's influence would be determinative, the post-Platonism of the post-War era on both sides of the Channel (or Ocean) can be seen most clearly in relation to Aristotle. Although Aristotle did not regard himself as a Platonist, both of the major strands of the twentieth-century reception of Plato have tended to regard Plato as an Aristotelian. While the Anglophone route to an Aristotelian Plato runs through developmentalism,⁸ Aristotle also plays an outsize role in the vastly more complicated Continental side of the story, and it is Heidegger's role in it that will be sketched here.

But before making the inevitable separation between Anglo-American Analytic and Continental traditions, and then following only the latter trail, it is important to emphasize at the start that the Plato who emerged from both traditions in the twentieth century was not the two-world proponent of the *chorismos* (χωρισμός),⁹ i.e., the radical separation of unchanging Being from the flux of Becoming. Although there are clearly differences between the routes each tradition takes to its own particular version of a post-Platonist Plato, the Anglo-American Analytic reception of Plato is not – at least from the perspective of traditional two-world Platonism – so very different from the Heidegger-inspired Continental reception, and indeed it can be harmlessly predicted that the two will draw ever closer to each other as this new century unfolds.¹⁰ And the responsibility for that development, should it ever come to pass, will rest with Aristotle or, to speak more accurately, with a conception of Plato guided and determined by the selective use of Aristotle's testimony about Plato.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, then, we find ourselves in a world where Plato scholars are more inclined to discover the meaning of Platonism in the *chora* (χώρα) of *Timaeus* than in the *chorismos* between the unchanging Ideas and the flux of Becoming that Aristotle made the core of his quarrel with Plato.¹¹ The existence of this well-known quarrel points to the first of two important paradoxes: the first is that the twentieth century's reception of Aristotle's portrait of Plato has been highly selective, and has for the most part ignored the elements in that portrait that offer conclusive support for the view that Plato was a traditional two-worlds Platonist who located his

8 Plato evolves into an Aristotelian, and for both logical and empirical reasons, this evolutionary story could not be told without Aristotle. For some examples in the Analytic tradition of Aristotelian readings of Plato, see Teloh (1981), 182 and 186 (on *Philebus*); Johansen (2010), 179–99; Gill (2012), 231–36.

9 See Natorp (1903), 73.

10 Suggestive is Kahn (2013), 204–6.

11 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A9, especially 991b1–3.

unchanging Ideas a world apart from the constant vicissitudes of Becoming. The other paradox is similar, but applies to Heidegger.¹² As indicated by its title, this essay's purpose is to tell or rather to sketch the story of the Heideggerian origins of a post-Platonist Plato. What makes this story so complex and difficult to tell is that Heidegger's own Plato was still a Platonist, just as Aristotle's was. Hence there are two parallel paradoxes, and although it will eventually become necessary to show how they are connected, for now it is enough to state them in a way that illustrates the parallel. When we discard Aristotle's testimony about the *chorismos* and the intermediates,¹³ and concentrate instead on his attribution of "the unwritten teachings" about the One and the Indefinite Dyad to his teacher, a more Aristotelian Plato becomes possible. In the same way, once Heidegger's followers discarded Heidegger's view that Plato had been a Platonist, it became possible for some of them to create a considerably less Platonist Plato. And this development provides the theme of this paper: the Heideggerian origins of the Continental reception of Plato, and thus the origin of today's post-Platonist version.

Before distinguishing three different classes among Heidegger's followers, each at variance with the other, it is necessary to offer some explanation for what it was in Heidegger's own Plato reception that was responsible for the decidedly mixed message his students evidently received. On the one hand, to be sure, the message was not mixed at all: following Nietzsche, Heidegger regarded Platonism as what his master had called: "the worst, the most tiresome, and the most dangerous of errors [*der schlimmste, langwierigste und gefährlichste aller Irrthümer*]."¹⁴ But unlike Nietzsche, Heidegger was deeply grounded in Aristotle,¹⁵ and this proved to be the critical difference. Not only did Heidegger approach Plato through Aristotle; more specifically, he approached "the late Plato" through Aristotle. The decisive moment here is Heidegger's 1924 Marburg course on Plato's *Sophist*: before beginning his analysis of the Platonic dialogue, Heidegger considered it necessary to find a preliminary "orientation" in Aristotle.¹⁶ This characteristic step proved to be fateful. It would not be the radical and rather simplistic anti-Platonism of the Nazi-era lectures published as *Einführung in der Metaphysik* that would guide

12 See Gonzalez (2009).

13 For a well-designed review of the Anglophone literature on this critical topic ("one of the longest-running shows in town" on 173 n. 5), see Shiner (1983), 180–3. Up to date is Arsen (2012), 200–23.

14 Nietzsche, "Preface".

15 See Rosen (2004) and van Buren (2002).

16 Heidegger (1997), 9–10.

the subtlest of his followers, but rather this initial if anachronistic approach to Plato through Aristotle.

Naturally the Second World War would complicate Heidegger's own reception, and the Nazi years made it prudent for many of his followers to distance themselves from their teacher. But not all of them did so where matters of substance are concerned: Heidegger was far too imperious and charismatic not to maintain the secure adhesion of many, although the brightest among those who remained loyal to the master's anti-Platonism saw fit to present themselves as steering an original course. The first class of Heideggerians to be distinguished here are therefore those who maintained their master's own antipathy to Plato's Platonism, but who for that very reason continued to view Plato as a Platonist, or at least as a thinker trying to be a Platonist on the false assumption that such a position could be consistently sustained. The purpose of these Heideggerians thus became to show that Plato's Platonism cannot be consistently sustained or defended, and indeed that it deconstructs itself. As indicated by this term, the most famous representative of this approach is Jacques Derrida, and he, in turn, has had notable followers, especially Luce Irigaray.¹⁷ While the Plato of Platonism is still real for Derrida and Irigaray – as he was for Heidegger as well – this Plato would now be deconstructed, i.e., his own words or texts would be used against him. Although Irigaray on Diotima or the Cave would bring the story to the same destination,¹⁸ Derrida alone will be taken as representative of this class in the sketch offered below, where it will be shown that his interpretation of the *chora* in Timaeus stems from his notion that two-world Platonism is undermined by the very arguments advanced to defend it.¹⁹

My emphasis on Derrida's reading of the *chora* is dictated not only by limitations of a space but for a dialectical purpose: it can be used to illustrate the second class of Heidegger's followers, the class that will receive most attention here. This class breaks with the master over Plato – i.e., Heidegger was wrong to think of Plato as a Platonist – and thereby appears to make a more respectable claim to independence with respect to intellectual substance than was possible for Derrida. In any case, the question of appearances is important because the post-Platonist Plato that emerges from this specious quarrel with

17 See Irigaray (1985), 341–64; Irigaray (1993), 20–33.

18 See Nye (1989), 47: "Although Diotima begins well with an ironic onslaught on dualistic, hierarchical categories, she soon reverts to an orthodoxy of her own. Instead of continuing to derail Socratic logic, Diotima becomes a Platonist." For the influence of Aristotle on Irigaray, see Hill (2012).

19 The principal text is Derrida (1993), 87–127.

Heidegger is a Heideggerian Plato, for whom Being is no longer unchanging, timeless, or other-worldly. Hans-Georg Gadamer is the foremost representative of this class, and at the center of this paper is an analysis of one of his essays in which he appears to distance himself from Heidegger on the correct interpretation of Plato's *Sophist*. An analysis of Gadamer's essay draws attention to the process by which he distinguished the Plato of Platonism from the real Plato, and what is amazing about this process will hereafter be called "the theme" of mine: for Gadamer, Heidegger was wrong about Plato because Plato was far more Heideggerian than Heidegger himself had thought.

But first it is necessary to complete the cast of characters: in addition to the likes of Derrida and Gadamer, there is first a third class to be considered, whose connection to Heidegger is far better concealed than is the case with either of the other two. These are "the esotericists," a term that will be applied here to both the Straussians and the school of Tübingen-Milan. The connection between these two schools of thought has rarely been noted,²⁰ and indeed proponents of the latter have been at some pains to deny any connection with the former.²¹ But there are some very obvious connections to be made: both schools attribute to Plato a teaching that is antithetical to traditional two-world Platonism, both have their roots in Germany, and both emerged in the post-War era, and more specifically, after the Second World War. Before turning, then, to "the Civil War" between the first two classes of Heideggerians as exemplified by Gadamer's Heideggerian rescue of Plato from his master's critique, an attempt will be made to locate in Heidegger an analogous link that binds together the esotericists. More specifically, the common bond is Heidegger's approach to Plato through Aristotle.

Consider the two nearly contemporary founding documents of the esotericist approach to Plato: Strauss's *The City and Man* (1964) – first presented as a series of lectures in 1962, before the publication of his article "Plato" in *A History of Political Philosophy* (1963)²² – and Hans Joachim Krämer's *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles: Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie* (1959), the published version of the 1957 dissertation he wrote under

20 Mediated by Gadamer and Jacob Klein, a comparative study of the Straussian and Tübingen schools is needed; for some useful steps in the right direction, see Staehler (2013), 65–94, especially 81. But it is a serious error to distinguish the two on a national basis (66): the roots of Strauss's approach are in Germany. A suggestive juxtaposition can also be found in Rockmore (2005), 197.

21 See Szlezák (1998), 69–90.

22 See the Preface to Strauss (1964). For Gadamer on Strauss, see Fortin (1984), 1–14.

the direction of Wolfgang Schädewaldt.²³ Surveying the latter's subtitle, a Platonist might well have asked what possible connection *Geschichte* might have to the *Wesen* of Plato's ontology: what relevance, that is, could historical developments, necessarily unfolding in time, have had on the timeless essence of Platonic Being? But because his approach to Plato is mediated by Aristotle – as Heidegger's too had been – Krämer's book is necessarily historical, and is forced to move backwards in order to justify a new approach “zum *Wesen der platonischen Ontologie* [to the essence of Platonic ontology].” Meanwhile, an anachronistic chapter “On Aristotle's *Politics*” precedes Strauss's most detailed study of Plato's *Republic* in *The City and Man*. While the connection between Plato and Aristotle is already made obvious by Krämer's title, it only takes a glance at Strauss's Table of Contents to see that he too considered it necessary to approach Plato through Aristotle. In both cases, this should be regarded as Heidegger's legacy.

Naturally Strauss was disinclined to reveal the Heideggerian origins of his approach to Plato, and he never mentioned in print that he had attended Heidegger's 1924 Marburg lectures.²⁴ On the other hand, the apologetic picture of an anti-Heideggerian Strauss has emerged only among his followers.²⁵ Steven Smith, a prominent Straussian, wrote this about the difference between his master's Plato and Heidegger's:

While Heidegger saw in Plato's theory of forms and the Idea of the Good the first and fateful step toward metaphysical nihilism, Strauss turned to the classics, especially Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*, to provide an articulation of the “natural consciousness” or the common sense understanding prior to the emergence of philosophy and modern scientific method.²⁶

First of all, it is precisely this appeal to “common sense” that justified Strauss's decision to begin *The City and Man* with Aristotle.²⁷ More importantly, Smith

23 Krämer (1959).

24 See Rosen (2004), 248.

25 The least apologetic of these is Velkley (2011).

26 Smith (2006), 116.

27 Strauss (1964), 12: “We contend that that coherent and comprehensive understanding of political things is available to us in Aristotle's *Politics* precisely because the *Politics* contains the original form of political science: that form in which political science is nothing other than the fully conscious form of the common sense understanding of political things.”

will soon enough acknowledge that Strauss rejects precisely the aspect of Plato that led Heidegger to regard him as the progenitor of nihilism: “the famous Platonic Ideas.”²⁸ What Smith does not acknowledge is that the philosophical link between Heidegger’s ultra-modern phenomenology of factual *Dasein*, and his return to the pre-Platonic conceptions of Being, Truth, and Nature,²⁹ is precisely “natural consciousness” or “the common sense understanding prior to the emergence of philosophy and modern scientific method” that Smith accurately attributes to Strauss. Heidegger locates the origins of the loss of this natural consciousness in the Platonic Idea. By replacing the Plato of Platonism – i.e., the philosopher of the transcendent Platonic Idea – with his own post-Platonist version, Strauss can well afford to return to “Plato” because this constitutes a merely verbal difference with his openly anti-Platonist teachers.³⁰ Unlike Heidegger, Strauss read Plato’s dialogues as merely exoteric texts, and thanks to Straussian hermeneutics, the Plato discovered between their lines had never subscribed to a motionless realm of unchanging Ideas.³¹

There is a story familiar to all students of Heidegger’s Freiburg rectorate that takes place shortly after he resigned: Schadewaldt wittily asked his colleague: “Back from Syracuse?”³² The point of this story is that Heidegger’s stint as rector had something Platonic about it: he had joined the Nazis and advanced their aims for the same reason that Plato had gone to Sicily, i.e., to make philosophy potent by joining it to political power. Disappointed by the results, as Plato had been before him, Heidegger had now returned to the safer world of academic speculation. Given Schadewaldt’s own pro-Nazi leanings,³³ and the fact that the two principal figures in the Tübingen school – Krämer and Konrad Gaiser³⁴ – were both his students, there is a deeper level of irony here: it would be Schadewaldt’s own students who brought Plato himself back from Syracuse. Plato’s *Seventh Letter* – basis of Schadewaldt’s witticism – is one of Tübingen’s foundation texts, at least to the limited extent that the school’s textual

28 Smith (2006), 122. For more on Strauss’s merely apparent “Platonism,” see Altman (2011).

29 Bambach (1995), 253, 268–9, and, on *Dasein*, 219–24, 237; for the general point, see 35: “To disclose ‘the original kind of being’ of nature and history ‘before scientific inquiry,’ Heidegger acknowledged a need to dismantle the whole metaphysical structure of Cartesian-Kantian science.”

30 For the influence of Nietzsche on Strauss, see Altman (2011), 154–5.

31 Strauss (1964), 118–21 and “Plato” in Strauss and Cropsey (1987), 70.

32 Thomä (2003), 146.

33 See Gadamer (1992), 12: “He [sc. Schadewaldt] was a Nazi, yes, he really was a Nazi, although in that rather ridiculous form in which professors were Nazis.”

34 In Philipp Merlan’s review of Konrad Gaiser’s first book, he says that both Gaiser and Krämer “come from Schadewaldt’s school”; see his “Review of Gaiser and Bröcker” (1965), 543.

foundations are to be found in the writings of Plato. Although broad swaths of Plato disappear in the erudite tomes produced by Tübingen-Milan, the disappearance of politics there is particularly noticeable,³⁵ and given the very limited portion of the *Seventh Letter* on which the school relies, one would never know that Plato had ever been to Syracuse.

The historical origins of the Tübingen's approach to Plato are difficult to determine, but as a start, one should distinguish an exoteric from an esoteric account of the historical origins of this particular type of esotericism. The former emphasizes Léon Robin,³⁶ who had been among the first to argue at length that the views Aristotle had attributed to Plato in *Metaphysics* A, M and N were Plato's own.³⁷ Here, by contrast, it has seemed safer to return directly to Aristotle, although the truth is doubtless far more complicated, and requires further study.³⁸ The important point for now is that while both Robin and Julius Stenzel had taken the "unwritten teachings" seriously, Schadewaldt's students went further: they reinterpreted all of Plato's dialogues on the basis of the One and Indefinite Dyad.³⁹ Despite the school's dependence on Aristotle, then, the doctrine of "principles" – the so-called *Prinzipienlehre* – was not, as it was for the Stagirite, merely the last and highest stage of Plato's development: it had motivated Plato from the start, and it explained all of his dialogues, even the early ones about virtue. The result was a Plato situated well beyond the borders of what had once been called "Platonism," and therefore the approach presupposed the bankruptcy of Platonism in its traditional form. Arising as it did from the rubble of Nazi Germany, this development cannot be understood except in the context of Heidegger.

Krämer's references to Heidegger in *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles* are few and scattered with the exception of a lengthy, apparently critical, but revealing footnote near the end of the book. After summarizing Heidegger's attack on the Platonic Idea on the basis of texts from *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Krämer remarks:

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- 35 See Krämer (1959), 25–6, 401, and 457–8 for the claim that the "unwritten teachings" are not absolutely inexpressible but rather incomprehensible to most people.
- 36 See Nikulin (2012), 2–3; Julius Stenzel and Heinrich Gomperz are also frequently mentioned in this context, as also here.
- 37 Robin (1908).
- 38 A key figure, especially important for connecting Tübingen and Strauss, is Jacob Klein; see his *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra* (1968). See especially 73: "We must not overlook the fact that the procedure by 'hypothesis' stressed by Plato is not a specifically 'scientific' method but is that original attitude of human reflection prior to all science which is revealed directly in speech as it exhibits and judges things." More generally, see 79–99.
- 39 As noted by Merlan (1965), 544.

This reading, which rests entirely on the popular conception of Plato [*das landläufige Platonbild*], will be deprived of its essential presuppositions – its negative theology, that attains its limit with but one basis [*die in Einem Grunde an ihre Grenze gelangt*], and the further-developed orientation, that reaches beyond Parmenides, of its ‘theory of ideas’ – with the demonstration of Plato the ἀρχή-thinker.⁴⁰

For Krämer, of course, “Plato the *archê*-thinker” (*archê* here is the Greek word for “principle”) is and always was the real Plato, not the traditional proponent of the Ideas; for this reason – and this is the crucial point, illustrating “the theme” – Tübingen’s Plato is immune to Heidegger’s anti-Platonism. While the characteristic rhetoric of the school increasingly demanded meticulous attention to ancient doxography as opposed to any discussions of modern philosophy,⁴¹ Krämer’s first book is more candid, discussing Plato’s One in terms of a worldly conception of Being that has far more to do with Heidegger than Plato:

The One in its nimble worldliness [*Weltzugewandtheit*] is the highest standard of existence [Seiendheit], value, and truth and thereby, as measure (μέτρον), is in connection to the world [*auf die Welt bezogen*]. The concept ἓν as μέτρον indicates thereby the basis of Being [Seinsgrund] in its relationship to the world generally and thus represents the correlation, the point of contact between the resting-in-itself [*in sich ruhenden*], transcendent Absolute and reality [*der Realität*].⁴²

“The transcendent made immanent” is as good a description as any for capturing the transformation of Platonism wrought by post-Platonic thought, and

40 Krämer (1959), 555 n. 4 (translation mine).

41 But see also Krämer (1990), 172 (emphases mine): “Therefore, the unity of Being for Heidegger, having passed through idealistic subjectivity, approaches anew the unity of subject and object analogically ascending, which in the Presocratics was present in a still naïve manner and which in Plato was expressly and thoroughly discussed [i.e., in ‘the unwritten teachings’] in unity itself, understood as a metaphysical entity. Heidegger himself, however, did not take account of the historical relationship of his conception of Being with that of Plato, because he did not take the indirect Platonic tradition into consideration and has not really made even Neoplatonism his own.” Also 173 (emphasis mine): “Not only the duality of the sensible world and the intelligible world but also the wider duality of principles on the basis of this Heideggerian position is definitely rejected: the Being of Heidegger, actually, can be compared with the Platonic sphere of the principles only considered as a whole.”

42 Krämer (1959), 547–8 (translation mine).

Heidegger's recreation of Being as *Dasein* constitutes the concealed *Seinsgrund* of this kind of *Weltzugewandtheit*.

In preparing now to make the transition from the third to the second class of Heidegger's followers, it should be noted at the outset that Gadamer's relation to Tübingen is problematic.⁴³ he was a useful ally in the early days of the movement,⁴⁴ but was always careful to maintain a certain distance, perhaps because of his awareness of Schadewaldt's political commitments. But then again it is always a bit difficult to take Gadamer's full measure. Here, more detailed attention will be focused on an essay written late in his long life about the Plato's *Sophist*.⁴⁵ The elderly Gadamer recalls attending – but recollecting little of – Heidegger's lectures on the dialogue.⁴⁶ But according to Gadamer, his teacher's approach was based on the misconception that the dialogue marked an inferior way-station on the road to Aristotle, while his own mature approach locates Plato's concern with "the question of Being."⁴⁷

In the Platonic dialectic there is instead a unique perspective on the vitalization of the question of Being [*Seinsfrage*] that does not culminate in the onto-theology of Aristotle. One may not, like Heidegger, see Plato's decisive step in measurement by the Eidos but rather in the opening for the Logoi, in which the relationships between the Ideas will be brought into the light.⁴⁸

43 For an important account that nevertheless underplays the connection, see Grondin (2010), 139–56; see especially 147 and 150–1 for the common ground. In the same collection, cf. Gonzalez (2010), 190, including n. 23. For Gadamer on Strauss, see Fortin (1984), 1–14.

44 See Gadamer and Schadewaldt (1968).

45 Gadamer (1991a), 7, 338–69.

46 Gadamer (1991a), 367: "Heidegger's 1924 lectures on the *Sophist* at Marburg, which I know only through the vague recollection of the immature auditor I then was, appear to me not to have been crafted for the single function [i.e., to show 'that Plato's thought about the Idea takes a step toward Aristotle's metaphysics'] that was openly presented for the first time later in 'Plato's Teaching on Truth.'" All translations from this essay are mine.

47 Gadamer (1991a), 367: "My own works on Plato have directed me, on the contrary [*umgekehrt*], ever more to the dialectical dialogues of the late period, and my immersion [*Vertiefung*] in the *Sophist* has presented it to me more and more as the opening of horizons within which, in fact [*zwar*], the question about Being [*die Frage nach dem Sein*] and the Logos shows itself in a variety of lights, but can scarcely be seen as a mere portal to Aristotelian physics and the metaphysics grounded upon it."

48 Gadamer (1991a), 367.

The paradoxical juxtaposition of Gadamer's critique of Heidegger⁴⁹ with his use of the Heideggerian expression *die Seinsfrage* is emblematic: Gadamer will distance himself from Heidegger's reading of Plato precisely by means of a hermeneutic that discovers in the text a new Plato who was more Heideggerian than Heidegger himself had taken him to be. A closer look at this text will flesh out "the theme" that is at this paper's center.

Among "the relationships between ideas" that will be brought to light in his *Sophist* essay, Gadamer emphasizes one above all: the interrelation of Motion and Rest. Appearing first as "the most opposite things" (τὰ ἐναντιώτατα at *Sophist* 250a8), Theaetetus proclaims the two unmixable at 252d4–11. For Gadamer, this proclamation is erroneous, and it is only Theaetetus, not the Stranger who upholds the false claim that Motion and Rest are "the most opposite":

Theaetetus remains on one point completely resolute: 'But in any case, motion and rest cannot exist together' (252d). This the Eleatic will confirm with suspicious haste and tone [*mit verdächtiger Eile und Betonung*]: 'according to the greatest necessities, that is impossible.' To be sure, not everything can be combined with everything; this the Eleatic will promptly confirm.⁵⁰

But according to Gadamer, the Stranger's "suspicious" confirmation is merely tactical, and his true purpose is to bring Motion and Rest together through the Logos:

One can see how presciently he prepares the young mathematician for the true essence of the Logos to be collection and division. Very deliberately, under the phrase 'greatest kinds' will 'kinesis' and 'stasis' draw closer together (and with that, by the end, also physics and mathematics, which likewise suggests itself in the third kind in *Philebus* (26d) as γένεσις εἰς οὐσίαν.⁵¹

Having written his *Habilitationsschrift* under Heidegger on *Philebus*,⁵² Gadamer is well prepared to recognize similar structures elsewhere:

49 For an easily accessible critique of his teacher, see Gadamer (1981), 434–44.

50 Gadamer (1991a), 359.

51 Gadamer (1991a), 359–60.

52 In addition, of course, to Gadamer (1991b), see Dostal (2010), 23–9, especially 27.

The unifying compatibility [*Vereinbarkeit*] of motion and rest, of Becoming (or rather alteration) with Being (or rather continuation) becomes the decisive new insight. What this means will not indeed be pursued further, but one will think about the mutual rapprochement [*die wechselseitige Annäherung*] of the two opponents in the battle of the giants. In response to the immateriality of intellection, the materialists come to understand Being as ‘dynamis’ while, on the other side, the recognition of life and ‘nous,’ and therefore of motion, has been demanded from the friends of the forms.⁵³

Here Gadamer refers to the important passage at 248c11–249b1 where the Stranger uses terms like *phronêsis*, *nous*, and *zôe* (φρόνησις, νοῦς, and ζωή at 249a9) in order to justify introducing *kinêsis* (movement or κίνησις at 249b2) into the apparently unchanging realm of Platonic Being.⁵⁴ The critical point is that even though Gadamer claims to have only a “vague recollection” of Heidegger’s lectures on the *Sophist*, the master had emphasized 248e7–249a2 in 1924: “the passage is the center and is decisive for understanding the whole ontological discussion.”⁵⁵ Heidegger’s interpretation of the passage thus anticipates Gadamer’s:

Plato has been understood to be saying here that the genuine beings, the Ideas, would have understanding, life, and the like. This is sheer nonsense. What the passage says is that φρόνησις, νοῦς, and ζωή keep company with the genuine beings; in other words, the meaning of Being must be conceived in such a way that νοῦς, κίνησις, and ζωή can also be understood as beings.⁵⁶

Because the Ideas undergo change by being known in this decisive passage, Plato must have been aware that there was a *koinônia* (κοινωνία) between

53 Gadamer (1991a), 360–1; Gadamer is describing the passage that served Heidegger as epigraph for *Sein und Zeit*.

54 Gadamer (1991a), 361: “When one recognizes motility [*Bewegtheit*] and consciousness in the unity of life and soul, then one will also remember that the same constitution of the world – soul in *Timaeus* determines the entire construction of the cosmogony.”

55 Heidegger (1997), 333; see also Gonzalez (2003), 102–33, especially 109, 111 n. 18, 114–6, and 122.

56 Heidegger (1997), 334; an attached note reads: “An understanding of Being pertains to Being.” Heidegger is referring to Eduard Zeller; cf. Vlastos (1973), 312 n. 7.

kinêsis and its opposite (στάσις or *stasis*).⁵⁷ But unlike Gadamer's, Heidegger's Plato is unaware of the ontological dimensions of his own thought.⁵⁸ The principal basis for this claim is Heidegger's comment on 252d4–11, where Theaetetus asserts that even he can prove that it is impossible for all beings, without exception, to combine with each other because Motion and Rest are "the most opposite" (ἐναντιώτατα).⁵⁹ Heidegger's comment on this disjunction is critical of Plato:

Here the distinction is clear between the essentially still ontical treatment of motion and rest in Plato versus the ontological treatment in Aristotle. Although Plato later says (256b6ff.) that there is a certain *κοινωνία* between κίνησις and στάσις – i.e., insofar as they are different, determined by the ἕτερον – he does not yet see the genuine connection, the peculiar substantive *κοινωνία* between motion and rest. In order to understand that *κοινωνία*, we may not take them, as Plato does, purely ontically.⁶⁰

It will be noted that, unlike his master, Gadamer does not criticize Plato. But since both teacher and student agree that Motion and Rest should not be disjoined, the real difference here is that Heidegger's Plato remains a Platonist,⁶¹ while Gadamer's does not. Gadamer uses hermeneutic subtlety to explain the apparent disjunction between Motion and Rest as purely tactical or

57 Heidegger (1997), 337: "Κοινωνεῖν in the sense of γιγνώσκειν is itself an ὄν, a something. This κοινωνεῖν includes, in the first place, a connection, a companionship, of the ψυχή, of νοῦς, with the εἶδη, i.e., a connection of γένεσις with the αἰεὶ ὄν. If there is a γιγνώσκειν, if it itself is an ὄν, then there exists a κοινωνία between γένεσις and αἰεὶ ὄν, between κίνησις and στάσις."

58 Consider Heidegger (1997), 410: "Therefore, in German, the term 'tense-word' [*Zeitwort*] is much more appropriate than the synonym 'verb' [*Verbum*]. Only on the basis of these phenomena can we see the proper categorical structure of ὄνομα and ῥήμα. Plato's discussion itself tends in this direction. It would be going much too far – at any rate there is no motive in the text – to identify πρᾶγμα, hence that which the exhibits στάσις, with ὄνομα, and πρᾶξις, hence that which the exhibits κίνησις, with ῥήμα." Cf. Gadamer (1991a), 363.

59 Heidegger (1997), 356–7: "Theaetetus is confident he can demonstrate the impossibility of this thesis himself, even though throughout the whole dialogue he has not accomplished very much. He says that this thesis would allow us even to take motion together with rest and rest together with motion; and that this is certainly quite impossible, for motion is indeed, in relation to rest, the ἐναντιώτατον (cf. 250a7), the furthest opposed."

60 Heidegger (1997), 357.

61 Heidegger (1997), 69: "Plato's theory of the χωρισμός of the Ideas, where Plato indeed explicitly assigns the Ideas to a τόπος, namely the οὐρανός."

pedagogical: thanks to the Stranger's pedagogy, Theaetetus will soon learn better. For Heidegger, by contrast, the disjunction lies in an unresolved tension in Plato's own thought that will only be resolved by Aristotle:⁶² the dialogue's discussion of Motion and Rest remains on the inferior ontic level because Plato himself does not grasp the ontological significance of the *koinônia* between thinker and thought that his Eleatic Stranger has discovered while introducing *kinêsis* into the realm of apparently unchanging Ideas at 248e7–249a2, an introduction lethal for traditional Platonism.⁶³

By juxtaposing Gadamer and Heidegger, this analysis reveals the archetypal moment of the Civil War among Heidegger's followers, i.e., the theme: Gadamer's critique of Heidegger's reading of Plato is based on the view that Plato is more Heideggerian than Heidegger had recognized. A similar pattern quickly becomes visible when we turn to the quarrel between the second class of them and the first, beginning with Derrida's interpretation of the *chora*. Derrida claims that the self-contradictions inherent in his *chora* deconstruct the dualism intrinsic to Platonism,⁶⁴ the dualism, it should be added, that restricts cosmology to the realm of mere opinion. Derrida thinks that what makes *Timaeus* ripe for deconstruction is the one-sided "abstraction" implicit in Platonism itself.⁶⁵ Drew Hyland, whose intellectual roots are in the school established in the United States by Strauss, valorizes Gadamer's in his book *Questioning Platonism* (2004),⁶⁶ explaining his relationship with Derrida in an important note:

I thus share with Derrida one crucial thesis: anything like Platonism is deeply and continually deconstructed in the Platonic dialogues.

62 Heidegger (1997), 381–2; cf. Gill (2012), 98–100, 210 n. 23, and 227 n. 55.

63 Heidegger (1997), 382: "There [the attached note reads '228c and 248–249c. Cf. 337f'; the actual reference is to 251a–252c] it was shown that the ontological possibility of the concrete phenomenon of γιγνώσκειν includes its being movement, and, as γιγνώσκειν τοῦ ὄντος, it is at the same time movement toward the things to be known. The or the ζώη is κίνησις and, as κίνησις, in a certain sense κίνησις εἰς αἰεί."

64 See Miller (2010), 321–41, particularly 334: "the deconstructive khôra functions in Derrida's reading of the *Timaeus* in much the same way as the pharmakon does in his reading of *Phaedrus*." For Miller on Derrida's reading of *Phaedrus*, see Miller (2007), chapter 5.

65 Derrida (1993), 119: "Platonism would mean, in these conditions, the thesis or the theme which one has extracted by artifice, misprision, and abstraction from the text, torn out of the written fiction of 'Plato.' Once this abstraction has been supercharged and deployed, it will be extended over all the fields of the text, of its ruses, overdeterminations, and reserves, which the abstraction will come to cover up and dissimulate. This will be called Platonism or the philosophy of Plato".

66 See "Derrida's Plato" in Hyland (2004), 165–7.

We disagree, however, in that I do not think that Platonism is asserted by Plato within the dialogues as his teaching.⁶⁷

This statement presents the theme of this essay in succinct form. Derrida's error, according to Hyland, is that he still mistakenly considered Plato to be a Platonist.⁶⁸ But Hyland's Derrida is right about the *chora*, and Hyland claims that it, along with *eros* and the Good,⁶⁹ deconstructs the dualism of Being and Becoming. Here, once again, is Hyland:

Indeed what the khora is marginal to, what it does deconstruct, that of which it does constitute the difference, is exactly the straightforward dualism of eternal Being and ever-changing becoming with which Timaeus begins his first beginning and which Derrida persists in identifying as Platonism. But is it at all plausible that this deconstructive moment takes place, as it were, in spite of Plato, that he was unaware of, or at least could not control, the way it undercuts the dualism of Timaeus' first beginning? This would only make sense at all on the interpretive assumption that the dialogues are in fact vehicles for the espousal of Platonic doctrines, and that the Platonic doctrine being espoused in the *Timaeus* is not the khora teaching but the less complicated dualism of Being and Becoming.⁷⁰

67 Hyland (2004), 192 n. 23.

68 Hyland (2004), 114: "he [sc. Derrida] believes that khora constitutes the deconstructive moment in Platonism, the difference of any Platonic dualism or doctrine of eternal essences."

69 Hyland (2004), 114–5: "Consider, then, the effect, taken together, of the three crucial notions of khôra, the Idea of the Good, and eros, three notions that no one could consider marginal to the Platonic dialogues. All three of these crucial notions undercut the clean dualism that constitutes Platonism, but each does so in a distinctive way." Cf. Hyland (2006), 20.

70 Hyland (2004), 114. This use of "unaware" is probably too strong: see Derrida, *Khôra*, 81–2, where Platonism is "an inevitable abstraction" which is also "extracted from the text, torn from the written fiction of 'Plato.'" Derrida continues (translations by Miller): "This abstraction... is deployed above all the folds of the text, its ruses, its overdeterminations... One will call this platonism or the philosophy of Plato, which is neither arbitrary nor illegitimate, since one relies thus on a certain force of thetic abstraction already at work in Plato heterogeneous text." Also to be considered is 83: "'Platonism' is certainly one of the effects of the text signed by Plato... but this effect finds itself turned back against the text."

It is precisely the rejection of the view that this “less complicated dualism of Being and Becoming” is Plato’s teaching that indicates the Heideggerian origins of the Post-Platonist Plato. For both Nietzsche and Heidegger, Plato remained a Platonist, and indeed he did so as well for some of Heidegger’s students. But as indicated by his response to Derrida, Hyland’s Plato is no Platonist,⁷¹ and the dominant move emerging from Continent – a move, incidentally, that is not without its analogue in the Anglo-American analytic tradition⁷² – has been to redesign Plato on post-Platonic lines. And it is this move that unites many of the otherwise disparate strands of Plato’s post-Modern reception.⁷³

Although the primary purpose of this essay will have been achieved if it has simply increased the reader’s sensitivity to what I have called “the theme,”⁷⁴ the story that has been merely sketched here unfortunately also suggests a disturbing moral. In his autobiographical musings, Gadamer is at pains to present Heidegger’s response to Plato not so much as an embrace of Nietzsche’s antipathy to Platonism, but as a timely reaction against Neo-Kantianism.⁷⁵

71 For a summary of Platonism that “risks parody,” see Hyland (1995), 165–6, ending with the important admission: “if anything like it is accepted, even if suitably filled out with elaborate ‘proofs’ of a previous life and immortality, of technical accounts of the nature and structure of the ideas, and of step-by-step education plans for preparing us to know them [note that this is a plausible description of my reading order project; see ix above.], then all my talk of the necessary finitude of human transcendence [this marks Hyland’s debt to Heidegger], of aporia as definitive of human philosophic living [this marks Hyland’s debt to Strauss], of eros as the human condition can be decisively overcome.”

72 Cf. Reeve (1985) and Vlastos (1973), The relationship between Reeve and Vlastos mirrors its Continental counterpart: while both Vlastos and Heidegger uphold as Platonic the disjunction between Rest and Motion, they can do so only at the expense of Plato’s ability to detect ambiguities or tensions in his own thought. Meanwhile, both Gadamer and Reeve undermine Plato’s commitment to the disjunction of Motion and Rest by the same means: both claim that the Stranger merely appears to uphold an indefensible doctrine for a pedagogical purpose.

73 Note that the phrase “postmodern Platos” does not refer to five different versions of Plato but to the five thinkers themselves in Zuckert (1996).

74 For some other examples, see Rosen (1970), 52: “the traditional picture of Plato as presented by modern scientific and geistesgeschichtliche scholarship prevents us from seeing important resemblances between Plato and Heidegger. Apparently Heidegger himself has been influenced by that traditional picture,” Berger (1994), 76: “the closure and commitment Derrida deconstructs should be ascribed to Platonism but not to Plato,” and Hampton (1994), 223: “Plato’s dialogues dramatize the struggle against dualism even as they sometimes lapse into such language.”

75 See “Autobiographical Reflections” in Palmer (2007), 1–38. In addition to “Plato was no Platonist” in the last sentence (38), see 6: “In the First World War’s grisly trench warfare

Moreover, Gadamer's book *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* – a perfect illustration, by the way, of Aristotle's role in the creation of a post-Platonist Plato – begins with a critique of Marburg Neo-Kantianism for its "prejudice" that Plato and Aristotle are in opposition.⁷⁶ Hermann Cohen, the school's founder, was of course Jewish,⁷⁷ as was Ernst Cassirer, famously opposed by Heidegger at Davos: a debate that also implicated the possibility of transcendence in Kant.⁷⁸ And so was Harold Cherniss, whose attack on reinterpreting Plato on the basis of Aristotle's testimony would make him Tübingen's principal modern foil.⁷⁹ Against the backdrop of the twentieth century, we need to ponder what Nietzsche wrote at the end of the nineteenth: "The Sophists were Greeks: when Socrates and Plato took up the cause of virtue and justice, they were Jews or I know not what."⁸⁰ Quite apart from this statement's political incorrectness with respect to Jews, who would say such a thing today about Plato? Although Heidegger followed his master in rejecting Plato for his Platonism, it is remarkable how little of the "Jew" that Nietzsche despised in Plato still remains in Heidegger's wake.⁸¹

and heavy artillery battles for position, the neo-Kantianism which had up to then been accorded a truly worldwide acceptance, though not undisputed, was just as thoroughly defeated as was the proud cultural consciousness of that whole liberal age, with its faith in scientifically based progress." See also Dostal (1985), 71–98. For examples of "the theme" (see previous note) in this insightful piece, see 74, 78, and 97.

76 See Gadamer (1986), 2: "If one starts from this idealistic neo-Kantian interpretation of Plato, then Aristotle's critique of Plato can only appear as an absurd misunderstanding. This fact further contributed to the failure to recognize the unitary effect [*Wirkungseinheit*] in Plato and Aristotle, thereby blocking a full incorporation of the Greek heritage [as opposed to what?] into our own philosophical thought. Such trivial and naïve juxtapositions as 'Plato the idealist,' versus 'Aristotle, the realist,' gained universal currency, although they actually only confirmed the truly abysmal depth of prejudice in any idealism of consciousness."

77 See Derrida (1991), 39–95.

78 See chapter 2 of Altman (2012).

79 The true relationship between Cherniss and Tübingen is indicated in Nikulin (2012), 7: "since the publication of the first books of Krämer and Gaiser, the critique of their work, and of those who joined them, has been relentless. Harold Cherniss argued against the very existence of the ἀγροφα δόγματα even before Krämer's and Gaiser's publications."

80 Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §429.

81 A portion of this paper was presented on November 6, 2013 at the XVI Colóquio de Filosofia Unisinos: Dialética e Hermenêutica: entre Platão e Gadamer, in São Leopoldo, RS, Brasil.

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Albert Camus' Hellenic Heart, between Saint Augustine and Hegel

Matthew Sharpe

We do not believe any longer in God, but we believe in history. For my part, I understand well the interest of the religious solution, and I perceive very clearly the importance of history. But I do not believe in either the one or the other, in an absolute sense. I interrogate myself and it annoys me very much that we are asked to choose absolutely between Saint Augustine and Hegel. I have the impression that there must be a supportable truth between the two.

ALBERT CAMUS, "Interview à 'Servir'" (1948)¹



The persistent voice of Greek and Roman antiquity has never ceased speaking in modern French letters, no less than in German thought across the Rhine.² The recovery of scepticism had a huge role in shaping Montaigne, Charron, *les nouveaux pyrrhoniens* and Bayle,³ before finding an apogee in the wit and *Philosophical Dictionary* of Voltaire; as the renaissance of Epicureanism had its say in the formation of Gassendi and Descartes.⁴ Recourse to classical motifs, and meditations upon the classical legacy, is a feature in Zola, Gide, and Malraux amongst other French novelists.⁵ Ancient models inform the "classical", early modern French theatre. During the years surrounding the Vichy tragedy, over a dozen leading playwrights produced dramas on classical themes. In this time, one critic has commented, "the Parisian stage became a virtual reincarnation of the theatre of Dionysus in 5th-century Athens [...]"⁶ As

¹ Camus (2006c), 659.

² Langlois (1971).

³ Cf. Popkin (2003).

⁴ Cf. Wilson (2008).

⁵ Thompson (1971) 68–80; Holdheim (1971) 111–30; Watson-Williams (1967); Blend (1963).

⁶ Miller (2007), 31.

works by Leonard and Allen Miller have emphasised, engagements with classical Greek thinkers (notably Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics) and Greek dramatists (notably Sophocles and his *Antigone*) are at the centre of the *oeuvres* of France's great, post-1960 theorists' work no less than France's literary modernists, mediated by central recourse to those earlier, Germanic "philhellenes" Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger: whether Lacan on Sophocles and Aristotle in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Derrida on Plato, Deleuze or the later Foucault on the Stoics, Lyotard on the sophists, and differently Pierre Hadot's works.⁷

This chapter aims to show how Algerian-born *litterateur* and philosopher Albert Camus (winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, 1957) represented a striking example of a 20th century French modernist whose work is decisively indebted to his sense of classical antiquity.⁸ Even a cursory acquaintance with Camus' work bears out the importance of classical receptions within it. His early essay collection *Noces*' title refers to the *hieros gamos* of pagan myth.⁹ His first philosophical book is entitled *The Myth of Sisyphus*. His major philosophical work, *L'Homme Révolté*, recurs centrally to the myth of Prometheus. Camus' *Carnets* are dotted with reflections on Plato, the Stoics, the classical tragedians, Greek and Roman historians.¹⁰ Camus' 1954 collection *L'Été* contains lyrical essays on "The Minotaur, or the Halt at Oran," "Helen's Exile," and "Prometheus in the Underworld". Although Camus was never an academic philosopher,¹¹ he wrote his *Diplôme des Hautes Études* thesis on "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism", including chapters on Gnosticism and Plotinus, and Augustine's debt to each.¹²

Yet, the neoclassicism of this Algerian-French *pied noir*, "born poor beneath a happy sky"¹³ in many respects stands out both from the classical receptions of his continental, Parisian contemporaries (with whom, led by Sartre, he painfully broke after *The Rebel* in 1952),¹⁴ and that of the succeeding, structuralist and post-structuralist generations. As Paul Allen Miller has examined, Camus' drama *Caligula* (1938, 1945, 1958) belongs alongside Annouilh's *Antigone*, Sartre's *Les Mouches*, and Brassilach's *Bérénice* in a generation of French, modernist theatre drawing on ancient paradigms to allegorically dramatise

7 Cf. Leonard (2009); Miller (2007), 61–226.

8 For two recent English-language explorations of this aspect of Camus' *oeuvre*, see Richardson (2011), 132–44, and Sharpe (2011), 577–92.

9 "In joy we prepare our lessons: Reading Camus' *Noces* via their reception of the Eleusinian mysteries", *Journal of classical receptions*, vol. 8, no. 3, Autumn, pp. 375–403.

10 See the "Note Annex" in Bousquet (1977), 112–3.

11 Cf. Camus (1966), 73; Camus (2006c), 659.

12 Camus (2007).

13 Camus (1965), 380.

14 See Spritzen (2004).

and “re-present” the wartime situation and choices of the resistance generation.¹⁵ Yet, a fuller appreciation of Camus’ thought in *L’Homme Révolté* and *L’Été*, alongside *La Peste* (1947) and *La Chute* (1956), bears out that Camus – like Miller’s post-structuralists – also looked to classical thought as the means to historically contextualise, and think *au dehors*, their modern present.¹⁶ Equally, however central a classical reception was to, for instance, Lacan’s or Derrida’s work, it remains clear that what attracts Lacan or Derrida in the ancients are particular, liminal moments (Antigone’s “no!” to Creon, Socrates’ *atopia*, the Platonic ambivalence concerning writing) anticipating their own, modernist theoretical projects: a psychoanalytic ethics “beyond the good”, or a post-Heideggerian deconstruction of Western metaphysics, etc. Camus much more directly identifies his literary and philosophical work with a “return to the Greeks.”

“My colleagues follow the path of German philosophers of the 19th century,” Camus could announce to jubilant reception in Athens in April 1955, “but me, I was nourished by Greek philosophy [...] I am the son of Greek philosophy.”¹⁷ This statement is far from one of a kind. Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 in Stockholm, Camus would again explain: “I have Christian preoccupations, but my nature is pagan. The sun [...] I feel at ease amongst the Greeks [...] the presocratics, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Parmenides [...] I have faith in the ancient values, as much as they have been badly represented since Hegel.”¹⁸ One of Camus’ two public addresses in Athens in 1955 had been a passionate argument for a return to tragic drama on the Greek paradigm, as modern men and women face down the increasingly fate-like realities of technological and historical developments.¹⁹

As we will see, this “Greek heart” for Camus is central to his call in the 1950s for a second “renaissance,”²⁰ and of his criticism of the “German philosophy” of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, which he traced back to their secularising of eschatological modes of thinking he associated with Augustinian Christianity.²¹ For purposes of exegesis, however, we will now divide Camus’ classical

15 Miller (2007), 27–60.

16 Miller (2007), 11.

17 Albert Camus à Athènes, *To Vina*, Athènes: 29 April 1955, at Papastavrou (2007), 107.

18 Bousquet (1977), 101.

19 Camus (1968), 295–310.

20 E.g., at Camus (1951), 380; Camus, “Entretiens sur la révolt” (2008b), 398; “Three Interviews,” (1968), 351.

21 The key text is *L’Homme Révolté* (1951), 239–92. This argument is at the heart of Srigley (2011).

reception into four interconnecting “receptions”. We begin with what has been called Camus’ “Greece of the flesh,”²² his founding experiences growing up in Mediterranean North Africa, which had an indelible effect on all his subsequent thinking and writing.²³

A Greece of the Flesh (*la chair*): Camus’ early, Mediterranean Philhellenism

François Bousquet’s observations, in *Camus Le Méditerranéen*, *Camus L’Ancien* that “at its origin, Camus’ philosophy is a lived philosophy”²⁴ have been increasingly appreciated in recent work on Camus.²⁵ Camus’ thought always responded to what he experienced as the pressing problems of the times: first, nihilism and suicide;²⁶ after 1942, totalitarianism and rationalised murder;²⁷ earlier and right up to his premature end, the Algerian crisis.²⁸ In all these responses, as in his creative work up to *Le Premier Homme*, Camus would nevertheless avow that he was searching to recover a truth or sense of existence he had first experienced growing up beneath *un ciel heureuse* in the poor quarters of French Algiers, with his near-mute mother, overbearing *grandmère*, illiterate uncle, and their mangy hound.²⁹ “To correct for a certain natural indifference, I was placed half-way between misery and sunlight,” Camus reflected in 1957:

Misery prevented me from believing that all is well under the sun and in history, while the sunlight taught me that history is not everything. To change life, yes, but not this world, which was my divinity.³⁰

This fundamental sense of natural “plenitude”³¹ which Camus received in his formative experiences bathing on the Mediterranean coasts, basking in the sun, admiring the half-naked beauties, keeping goal in the local team, and tasting for the first time the joys of sensual love, lies at the heart of his lifelong

22 I am borrowing the happy expression of Planeille (2007), 41–3.

23 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 216.

24 Bousquet (1977), 103, 104.

25 Cf. Onfray (2013); in English language, Sharpe (2013), 8.1: 1149–64.

26 Camus (1942).

27 Camus (1951).

28 Camus (1958).

29 Cf. Camus, “Preface” to *L’envers et L’endroit*, 13–17.

30 Camus, Camus, “Preface” to *L’envers et L’endroit*, 6–7.

31 Camus (1965), 380.

resistance to being dubbed an “existentialist.”³² This “Mediterranean” sensibility thus for instance shapes the marvellous opening of “*L’Exil de Helen*,” written in 1948 at the height of Camus’ post-war political activism, as his divisions for his Parisian contemporaries were becoming increasingly pointed:

The Mediterranean has its sunlit tragedy which is not that of the mists. On certain evenings, on the sea, at the foot of the mountains, night falls on the perfect curve of a little bay, and an anguished fullness rises from the silent waters. We realise in such places that if the Greeks experienced despair, it was always through beauty and its oppressive quality. Tragedy, in this golden sadness, reaches its highest point [...]³³

The purest articulation of Camus’ youthful worship of the sea, sun, and beauty of the Mediterranean however is found in the opening essay of his earlier collection *Noces*, “Nuptials at Tipasa”. The essay documents the young Camus’ visit, with an unnamed lover, to the Roman ruins on the coast at Tipasa. Here, as the young initiate hymns:

I understand what is meant by ‘glory’: the right to love without limits [...]. In a sense, it is truly my life that I’m playing here, a life that tastes of warm stone, full of the sighs of the sea and the cicadas who are starting to sing now. The breeze is cool and the sky blue. I love this life with abandon and want to speak of it with liberty: it makes me proud of my human condition. True, others have often told me there is nothing to be proud of. And yet, there is: this Sun, this sea, my heart leaping with youth, my body tasting of salt and the vast setting where tenderness and glory merge in the yellow and the blue [...]³⁴

Rather than coming to love the Greeks through the classical literature, Gide, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer we know Camus was being fed by Jean Grenier, then René Poirier,³⁵ Camus clearly responded in classical literature to what he felt was a common “Mediterranean” sensibility. His 1937 “The New Mediterranean Culture,” one of his first philosophical publications, tries to

32 Cf. “Non, je ne suis pas existentialiste [...]” (1945) in (2006b), 655–6; with Camus, “Pessimism and Courage” (1960), 58. Cf. Camus, “On Jean-Paul Sartre’s *La Nausée*” (1968), 113.

33 I have followed here the, in the author’s opinion, superior translation by Thody in Philip Thody ed. *Albert Camus, Selected Essays and Notebooks* (London: Penguin, 1979), 136.

34 Camus “Nuptials at Tipasa” (translation adapted) (1968), 68–9.

35 On Camus’ early *paideia*, see Crochet (1973), 18–43; also Lottman (1981), 38–76.

delineate the features of a new Mediterranean, distinctly philhellenic humanism. Camus wanted to oppose the ideal Romanesque "Latinity" at that time being touted by Charles Maurras, Louis Bertrand, and Mussolini's fascists.³⁶

Camus' idealisation of an ideal "Greek" sense of life, the physical world and its beauty is given its most systematic expression in his *Diplômes* thesis of 1936. Here, he posits a "Hellenism" whose this-worldliness, ideal of wisdom (contrasted to salvation), and explanation of evil as rooted in error and ignorance was superseded with the rise of evangelical Christianity and Augustine's "second revelation," mediated by neo-Platonism's "mystic reason." "Hellenism implies that man can be self-sufficient and that he has within himself the means to explain the universe and destiny," Camus argues:

In a certain sense, the Greeks accepted a sportive and aesthetic justification of existence. The line of their hills, or the run of a young man on a beach, provided them with the whole secret of the world. Their gospel said: our Kingdom is of this world. Think of Marcus Aurelius': "Everything is fitting for me, O cosmos, which fits thy purpose."³⁷

Nevertheless, as the thesis stipulates from the beginning, for Camus as for Nietzsche before him, the Greece of Camus' idealisation also had a darker side, carried in their myths and sublimated in their tragedies:

Aeschylus along with Sophocles, the primitive masks and the Panathénées, the lecythes of the fifth century alongside the metopes of the Parthenon, and finally the mysteries as well as Socrates, all incline us to emphasize, next to the Greece of light, a Greece of darkness, [...] just as real.³⁸

Diagnosed at 16 with tuberculosis and told he had just a week to live, Camus' abiding appreciation of the two-sidedness of Greek thought remains rooted in his own, profound sense of the imminence of mortality, and as such, the transience of the sensual delights he savoured. *Noces'* second essay, immediately following the joyous "Nuptials at Tipasa," explores this darker side to Camus' thought, and opens out to his sense of the two-sidedness of the classical world.

36 It is always for Camus the Greeks, not the Romans, who are celebrated, although Camus appreciated Aurelius and Seneca. On the importance of this, in relation to Camus' Algerian identity, and his need to save a kind of Mediterranean identity from colonialist appeals to Algeria's Roman past as vindications for present policy, see Richardson (2012), 66–89; also Foxlee (2010); also Foxlee (2006), 75–94.

37 Camus (2007), 40.

38 Camus (2007), 40. Cf. Camus, "Helen's Exile" (1968), 151.

Amidst the “violent bath” of sun, in the Algerian highlands near the decaying classical ruins at Djemila, Camus reports feeling “defenceless against all the forces within me that were saying No”; gripped by the “physical terror of the animal that loves the sun.”³⁹ Throughout Camus’ work, most famously in *L’Étranger*, readers are confronted with evocations either of the desert or the blinding darkness at the heart of the searing Mediterranean sun.⁴⁰ These natural phenomena for Camus epitomise the inhuman dimension of the natural world, so destructively manifest in such natural evils as the plague, around which both *La Peste* (1947) and *L’État de Siège* (1948) turns. This is nature as it resists our best efforts at comprehension and control: “[...] not a world made to the measure of man – but which is closed to us”;⁴¹ yet whose majesty, paradoxically, resides in this transcendence of humanity

At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia, for a second we cease to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the images and designs that we had attributed to it beforehand, whereas now we lack the power to make use of that artifice. The world evades us *because it becomes itself again*.⁴²

Even in Camus’ tellingly titled *L’Envers et L’endroit* of 1937, Camus’ sensual philhellenism⁴³ points towards the parameters of Camus’ mature philosophical defence of classical “balance” in the late 1940s and 1950s. As Camus would comment wryly in a later interview, aligning this “Greece” directly with his own, Mediterranean origins:

The right explanation is always double, at least. Greece teaches us this, Greece to which we must always return. Greece is both shadow and light. We are well aware, aren’t we, if we come from the South, that the sun has its black side?⁴⁴

39 Camus, “Wind at Djemila” (1968), 75, 77.

40 Cf. e.g. Camus, “Three Interviews” (1968), 357; also “The Enigma” (1968), 155.

41 Camus, “Love of Life”, 56; cf. Bousquet (1977), 31.

42 Camus (1942), 30–1.

43 A “Greece according to the flesh,” in Planeille’s happy phrase which we have used here, at Planeille, “L’Hellade”, 41.

44 Camus, “Three Interviews” (1968), 357.

In Defence of *Mesure*: Camus' Hellenic "*Pensée du Midi*"

"But there was darkness also in men's hearts," Camus' neoStoic Doctor and diarist, Rieux, reflects at one point in the annals of the plague that decimated a fictive Oran in 194–.⁴⁵ And so it was that Camus' plans to follow his dreams to visit *mētera Helláda* in late 1939 were cut short by the advent of a second world war:

The year the war began I was to board a ship and follow the voyage of Ulysses. At that time, even a young man without money could entertain the extravagant notion of crossing the sea in search of sunlight. But I did what everyone else did. I did not get on that ship. I took my place in the queue shuffling towards the open mouth of hell. Little by little, we entered. At the first cry of murdered innocence, the door slammed shut behind us.⁴⁶

From 1942 onwards, Camus' work turns from the more individual focus of his youthful work towards "the recognition of a community whose struggles are shared."⁴⁷ Camus' popular reputation as an existentialist is associated principally with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (written 1938–1941, published 1942). The famous "absurd" of that book, however, in no way involves the nihilistic claim that "the world is meaningless." Camus' meditations begin with the sense which he found "in the streets of his time",⁴⁸ that the generation raised amidst war, depression and the rise of fascism could no longer accept the Christian teaching of a providential, revealed deity. *Le Mythe* however argues that this recognition does not necessarily, or honestly, imply resignation or despair. In a formulation from his final wartime "Letters to a German Friend", repudiating what Camus saw was the irrationalist core of fascism's "might is right" teaching:⁴⁹ "even if I continue to believe that the world has no ultimate meaning [...] I know that something in it has meaning, and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having this meaning."⁵⁰ The "absurd"⁵¹ is the reflective recognition of the disproportion between our legitimate, inalienable desire for unity and belonging in the world, and a world whose reality resists

45 Camus (1970), 190. Compare Malraux's worldview, ably described in Blend (1963).

46 Camus "Prometheus in the Underworld" (2006c), 139.

47 Camus, "Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*" (1968), 339.

48 Camus, "The Enigma" (1968), 159.

49 Camus also explores this in "Le Terrorisme d'État et la Terreur Irrationnelle" (1951), 227–38.

50 Camus, "Letters to a German Friend" (1960), 21 [italics ours]

51 A label Camus later regretted, see Camus, "The Enigma" (1968), 155–60.

totally satiating this desire. Accordingly, to embrace atheistic or theistic forms of despair – as if the human desire for meaning did not accord an unshakable dignity upon human beings ‘from the ground up’, as it were – is as philosophically indefensible, for Camus, as to accept a totalising Rationalism – as if events like the suffering of innocents, epidemics and earthquakes did not bespeak our limited, vulnerable place within a Whole whose inhuman scale and majesty exceeds our best laid plans.

Le Mythe de Sisyphe hence argues that suicide cannot be vindicated on the basis of metaphysical scepticism. To suicide is to make a philosophical “leap” which lucidity cannot sanction.⁵² *L’Homme Révolté* of one decade later, drawing on the same premises and Camus’ reflections on his experiences as a member of the French resistance, argues that murder can likewise not be rationally defended – short of the embrace of the kinds of totalising theological and philosophical positions modern Europe has allegedly left behind.⁵³

Camus’ continuing recourse to classical Greek thought has led some critics to see in his work a totalising repudiation of a singular “modernity”,⁵⁴ but this position arguably overstates things. As Novello has argued, Camus instead ties his own experience of solidarity and revolt in the resistance to fascism to his evolving sense of the meaning of classical Greek thought.⁵⁵ It is this unique modern-ancient synthesis which shapes *L’Homme Révolté*’s closing advocacy of what he calls “Mediterranean” or “midday thought” against the legacy of modern German philosophy (principally Hegel and Nietzsche). The book as a whole defends the early modern rebellions against absolute, theologically sanctioned monarchies, and the kinds of theodical rationalisations of natural evils like to those which (outraging Voltaire and others) suggested that events like the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 could be rightful divine punishment for innate human sinfulness. The greatest part of *L’Homme Révolté* is devoted to tracing how, nevertheless, such legitimate, limited “rebellious” defences of human solidarity (the “we are” of all presently-existing human beings⁵⁶) against natural and theologically sanctioned suffering gave over to forms of excessive “revolutionary” positions. These each ended, from the Terror to the *Shoah*, in

52 Camus, “La Suicide Philosophique” (1942), 48–74.

53 Camus, “Révolte et Meurtre” (1951), 349–66; Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine” (1960), esp. 210–34.

54 Notably, Strigley (2011); but also Novello (2007), 125–42. Both place great weight on Camus’ comment, in light of a contrast between Greek thought as beginning in a sense of beauty while for “Europeans,” beauty is at most a goal, “Je ne suis pas moderne,” Camus (1964), 240. Cf. succeeding note also.

55 Novello (2007), 132–3.

56 Camus (1951), 38, 351, 370.

humans *hybristically* claiming for themselves the formerly-"divine right" to take innocent human lives with impunity. Again, as *Le Mythe* had situated Camus' position between absolute Rationalisms and Irrationalisms, *L'Homme Révolté's* "midday thought" aims at a mean between forms of total "negation" of this natural or created order which condemns innocents to suffer (Sade, the romantics, the Jacobins' "republic of virtue"); and forms of total "affirmation" of *le monde, comme il va* (whether in forms of Nietzschean valorisation of an extra-human will to power; or Hegelian, then Marxist sanctifications of class struggle or the life-and-death struggle for recognition). To use a term borrowed from Hans Blumenberg, for Camus these position "reoccupy" the kind of absolute or totalising positions previously upheld by forms of theological thinking and thereby betray the normative promise revealed in humans' continuing revolts against political and larger orders which sanctify the killing of innocents.⁵⁷

Indeed, at the heart of *The Rebel*, we find Camus recurring to his earlier attempts to try to delineate the difference between classical and Judaeo-Christian thought, in search of alternatives to the totalising revolutionary ideologies of far Left and Right. In particular, Camus genealogically traces the origins of the kinds of historicism and messianism in play in fascist and Stalinist attempts to "immanentise the eschaton" of an end of history or millennial Reich back to Christianity's notion of a uni-directional salvific History (from genesis, via fall, towards redemption). Any theology or philosophy of History, Camus argues, is opposed to classical thought's sense of time, rooted in the circular recurrences of the natural world:

In contrast to the ancient world, the unity of the Christian and Marxist world is astonishing. The two doctrines have in common a vision of the world which completely separates them from the Greek attitude. [...] The Christians were the first to consider human life and the course of events as a history that is unfolding from a fixed beginning toward a definite end, in the course of which man achieves his salvation or earns his punishment. The philosophy of history springs from a Christian representation, which is surprising to a Greek spirit [...]⁵⁸

It is as the response to this diagnosis of the ideological causes of modern totalitarianisms in secularised eschatologies that Camus' classical reception plays a key role in *L'Homme Révolté*.⁵⁹ On one hand, Camus' "Mediterranean" thought

57 Blumenberg (1993), 48–9, 59–61, 64–5.

58 Camus (1951), 241. Cf. Camus, "Helen's Exile" (1968), 151; Camus (2007), 107–10; Camus (1951), 244–5.

59 See Camus (2006c), 1061.

is associated⁶⁰ with a sage scepticism, and reflective awareness of the limits of human understanding:

A fragment attributed to [...] Heraclitus states simply "Presumption, regression of progress." And centuries after the Ephesian, Socrates, threatened by the death penalty, granted himself no other superiority than this: he did not presume to know what he did not know. The most exemplary life and thought of these centuries ends in a proud avowal of ignorance. In forgetting this, we have forgotten our virility [...].⁶¹

For Camus, the first problem with totalitarian ideologies which claim to decipher the Meaning of History, without God, is epistemic. Like the ancient sceptics or Stoics, he thinks we need to relearn the virtue of withholding assent to what is not cataleptically given, recognising when what we claim to know is only conjectural. "In reality, the purely historical absolute is not even conceivable," Camus argues: "Jaspers's thought, for example, [...] underlines the impossibility of man's grasping totality, since he lives in the midst of this totality. History, as an entirety, could exist only in the eyes of an observer outside it and outside the world."⁶² Yet it is exactly this epistemic presumption of knowing the Meaning of History which, in the totalising ideologies vindicating fascism and Stalinism, is mustered to license advocates' right to kill and enslave. Rebellion, by contrast to these revolutionary positions, asserts only the right to resist all forces which presume a 'license to kill,' whatever their metaphysical foundations:

Rebellion is in no way the demand for total freedom. On the contrary, rebellion puts total freedom up for trial [...] the rebel wants it to be recognized that freedom has its limits everywhere that a human being is to be found – the limit being precisely that human being's power to rebel [...].⁶³

60 Selectively, as it must be said of a millennium of thought embracing everyone from Pyrrho to Iamblichus, the poets and the philosophers, Greeks and Romans, the many and the oligarchs, republicans and imperialists. Camus' Greeks are closer to a Weberian "ideal type", responding to and shaping his sensibility and engaged responses to the contemporary world than the type of more exhaustive, differentiated accounts of the classical world demanded of a classicist or professional historian of ideas, although at different points especially the poets, in contrast to the philosophers, are emphasised. On Camus' "Greeks" as an ideal type, cf. Bousquet (1977), 108–9.

61 Camus, "Helen's Exile" (1968), 149–50.

62 Camus (1951), 361.

63 Camus (1951), 355.

If we are to rediscover, culturally, a sense of such inalienable ethical limits, Camus' argument is that we can do no better than look back to the classical Greeks. But, at this point of the argument, it is not simply sceptical or Socratic humility that Camus calls upon. He wants to align this epistemic humility with the classical sense that the ethical and metaphysical *limits* circumscribing the human condition mirror the limits and larger order evident in the recurrences of the natural world:

The Greeks, who for centuries questioned themselves as to what is just, could understand nothing of our idea of justice [...] At the dawn of Greek thought Heraclitus was already imagining that justice sets limits for the physical universe itself: "The sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, the Erinyes, the handmaids of justice, will find him out." We who have cast the universe and spirit out of our sphere laugh at that threat. In a drunken sky we light up the suns we want. But nonetheless the boundaries exist, and we know it...⁶⁴

Leaving aside here the difficulty in reconciling Camus' simultaneous embrace of modern, sceptically-grounded science, and call for a renewed sense of nature "as an object of contemplation and admiration,"⁶⁵ "we come at this mid-point to Camus' key notion of "balance" or *mesure*. Camus' defence of philosophical and ethical "limits" is the affirmative side to his repudiation of claims to absolute knowledge, which he calls so many competing forms of monologic "excess" (*démesure*):

Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man, in the place where solitude is found. We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others [...] ⁶⁶

Camus presents classical Greek thought as calling upon us to refuse to totalise, as "the one thing needful", any one component of human experience: reason or passion, vulnerability or power, nature or history, innocence or culpability, the gods or human independence, justice or mercy, political life or contemplative creation. Camus instead asks us to embrace a thought which would

64 Camus, "Helen's Exile" (1968), 149, 152.

65 Camus (1951), 374.

66 Camus (1951), 376.

“exclude nothing.”⁶⁷ Yet again, he expresses this idea (borrowed from Pascal) that “nothing is true that compels us to exclude”⁶⁸ in the language of classical *sophrosyne*; by appealing to the *mēdan agan* that adorned the portals at Delphi, which Camus contended is also the key message of the choruses in the tragedies.⁶⁹ Camusian *measure* involves the same, lucid openness to the two-sidedness of our condition that we saw the young Camus recognising in classical thought in his *Diplômes* thesis and earliest writings, mirrored in his own experiences. “Greek thought [...] never carried anything to extremes, neither the sacred nor reason, because it negated nothing, neither the sacred nor reason. It took everything into consideration, balancing shadow with light,” “Helen’s Exile” affirms.⁷⁰ An important passage in *L’Homme Révolté* elaborates this neoclassical “law of moderation,” as Camus sees it operating even at the level of theoretical reason:

This law of moderation equally well extends to all the contradictions of rebellious thought. The real is not entirely rational, nor is the rational entirely real. [...] The irrational imposes limits on the rational, which, in its turn, gives it its moderation [...] In the same way, [...] where could one perceive essence except on the level of existence and evolution? [...] Something that is always in the process of development could not exist – [...] [yet] being can only prove itself in development [...] The historical dialectic, for example, is not in continuous pursuit of an unknown value. It revolves around the limit, which is its prime value [...].⁷¹

Decisive in this regard that Camus’ *L’Homme Révolté*, like *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is structured around Camus’ reflections on the classical myth of Prometheus, that first humanistic rebel against Zeus, in contrast to Satan, dear to Milton, the romantics, and the surrealists led by André Breton.⁷² Comparison of the two divine rebels highlights the great shift between Christian and classical thought, in Camus’ presentation. Camus’ key claim⁷³ is that Prometheus rebelled

67 The key statements of this idea, which Camus associates especially with Pascal, come in Camus (1964), 54; Camus, “Prometheus in the Underworld” (2006c), 142; and Camus, “Return to Tipasa” (1968), 165, 169.

68 Camus, “Return to Tipasa” (1968), 165.

69 Camus, “The Future of Tragedy” (1968), 301–2.

70 Camus, “Helen’s Exile” (1968), 148–9.

71 Camus (1951), 369.

72 Cf. Camus (1951), 70–8, 110–7.

73 Camus (1951), 46.

against only one God, albeit the tyrannical leader of the Olympians: not, like Satan, *contra* Creation *per se*: "It is a question of settling a particular account, of a dispute about what is good, and not of a universal struggle between good and evil."⁷⁴ For Camus' Greeks, to nihilistically repudiate all of Nature and Destiny itself is an exercise in "barbaric" futility emblematised by the Great King Darius' striking with rods at the sea at Salamis.⁷⁵ Any "metaphysical rebellion" which as such claims to deny all meaning to reality or human life, outside of the blind play of force, class war or race struggle, "presupposes a simplified view of creation – which was inconceivable to the Greeks," Camus claims.⁷⁶ Greek polytheism mythically expresses, for Camus, a more balanced sense of the place of human reality in a larger, *plural* order of the world. We are neither at its providential centre nor, because of that, bereft of our own limited place and intrinsic dignity.⁷⁷ "In their universe there were more mistakes than crimes, and the only definitive crime was excess . . .",⁷⁸ Camus argues:

Of course, the Greeks described excess, since it exists, but they gave it its proper place and, by doing so, also defined its limits. Achilles' defiance after the death of Patroclus, the imprecations of the Greek tragic heroes cursing their fate, do not imply complete condemnation [...] The Greek mind has two aspects and in its meditations almost always re-echo, as counterpoint to its most tragic melodies, the eternal words of Oedipus who, blind and desperate, recognizes that all is for the best [...].⁷⁹

Camus' neoStoic Hellenism: A Return to the Virtues

It is this classical sense of the limits facing the human condition, of our belonging in a natural order which is at once larger than us, worthy of our respect, but

74 Camus (1951), 46.

75 Camus (1951), 46; Camus "Helen's Exile" (1968), 150.

76 Camus (1951), 47.

77 Cf. the quote which Camus uses to introduce "Prometheus in the Underworld" from Lucian: "I felt that the gods were lacking as long as there was nothing to oppose them" (2006c), 1061, 476.

78 The assignment of evil to error, ignorance, or excessively hypostasising a part over the whole, rather than an innate or radical evil in human nature, is a constant feature of Camus' understanding of Hellenism, and his own work. See Rieux's decidedly Socratic or Stoic reflection in Camus (1970), 148–9.

79 Camus (1951), 46–7. On this "all is well" of Oedipus, a recurring figure in Camus, cf. Camus, "On the Future of Tragedy" (1968), 304–5, 307; and Camus (1942), 166–7.

within which we have an inalienable dignity – one which “negates all tyrants and gods” that would deny this⁸⁰ – that Camus thinks the modern world desperately needs to recover. This recovery, in a wildly unfashionable manner, Camus argues will require the recultivation of classical virtues or even a second renaissance.⁸¹

Camus, in his *Diplômes* thesis, had noted that, even in late antique Gnosticism, neoPlatonism, and the mystery cults, initiation (implying the active acquisition of knowledge) differs from a salvation, delivered by grace from above.⁸² The early evangels’ hostility to knowledge, Paul’s emphasis on faith over works, and Augustine’s critique of the pagan cultivation of virtues as rooted in pride⁸³ all mark out this decisive cultural shift. It is no surprise given the centrality to his thought of classical Greek culture then to find that, from his earliest writings, Following this thread, Camus strives towards a language capable of giving voice to a profile of distinctly classical virtues, rooted in the classical philosophical sobriety we have seen, in contrast to the modern messianisms he opposes. We have remarked how central to his thought was classical moderation, in one sense the principal of all of the classical, civic virtues. Equally, we have highlighted how Camus valorises a particular, “measured” conception of wisdom, aware of its own limits and excluding no decisive component of our divided condition, which he calls lucidity or *clairvoyance* (clear-sightedness). Yet, as he becomes more politically engaged, Camus’ defence of what he calls in “The Almond Trees” of 1942 certain “conquering virtues” becomes more pronounced in Camus’ thought in sharp contrast with contemporary existentialism.⁸⁴

Camus’ classical “virtue ethics” does not involve a pedantic exercise in “returning to the Greeks”, as if we could recover the old “[...] world covered with Greek statues [...]”⁸⁵ It is a modernist attempt to reshape the classical heritage in light of the need to respond to the European crisis, announced by 30 years of war, fascism, the gulags, and the advent of the nuclear age. Camus himself several times expresses his scepticism about any too pure notion of

80 Cf. Camus, “Letters to a German Friend,” (1960), 14.

81 Camus, “Prometheus in the Underworld,” (2006c), 137.

82 Camus (2007), 52–3, 68–9.

83 Camus (2007), 120.

84 Camus, “The Almond Trees,” 137. Each of the key lyrical essays in the 1954 collection *L’Été* in particular defends one or more such virtues: strength of character (“Almond Trees”); courage tied to intelligence (“Prometheus in the Underworld”); humility and friendship (“Helen’s Exile”); the sense of beauty and continuing faith in, and love for, the human condition everywhere.

85 Camus, “L’Artiste et son Temps”, (2008b), 454.

virtue.⁸⁶ He reflects characteristically that “I know myself too well to believe in pure virtue.”⁸⁷ Differently, like Montaigne or Voltaire before him, both of whom (versed in the classical heritage) associated the cruelty of Europe’s religious wars not with a recursion to animal barbarity so much as with agents fanatically convinced of their righteousness,⁸⁸ Camus can write in the mid-1940s that “[p]ractically, and for the moment, I prefer a bum who does not kill anyone to a puritan who kills everybody [...]”⁸⁹

In particular, and in notable contrast to Nietzsche and Heidegger, Camus insists that it is a continuing, “adolescent” fascination with ideals of “heroism,” “fidelity” or “authenticity” that needs to be tempered. Heroism and fidelity, for Camus, are virtues. But, if we raise the classical question concerning the relation between the different excellences, Camus argues that heroism is at most a “secondary” virtue, since it can as well animate the guards of concentration camps as the founders of houses of mercy. “One cannot justify just any type of heroism, any more than any type of love,” Camus observes.⁹⁰ “Heroism and courage should be considered as secondary values – after having given proof of courage.”⁹¹ Indeed, if the young Camus rightly identifies that the Greek philosophers, “[w]ithout always acknowledging it, [...] made their sages God’s equals [sic.]”;⁹² it is precisely this apotheotic register of the classical philosophical heritage – which he contrasts to the tragic poets’ critique of *hybris* – that Camus rejects: “[a]t this meridian of thought, the rebel thus rejects divinity in order to share in the struggles and destiny of all men. We shall choose Ithaca, the faithful land, frugal and audacious thought, lucid action, and the generosity of the man who understands [...] this is the end of romanticism.”⁹³ Consistently, Camus’ philosophy, political advocacy, and literature defend the nobility of people living ordinary lives well – the Hungarian worker who struggles for his bread, the physician like Rieux who conscientiously does his work,⁹⁴ and humble men and women like the ironically-named Grand in

86 Especially Camus, “Les Témoins de la liberté” (2006c), 494.

87 Camus (1966), 105; cf. 88, 141.

88 Camus repeats this argument of the 20th century at Camus, “Projet de preface” (2006c), 500.

89 Camus (1964), 212.

90 Camus, “Entretien sur la révolte” (2008b), 401.

91 Camus (1964), 123–4.

92 Camus (2007), 41; Camus (1964), 98.

93 Camus (1951), 381–2.

94 “Je n’ai pas du gout, je crois, pour l’héroïsme et la sainteté,” Rieux underscores to Tarrou, at Camus (1970) 276.

*The Plague*⁹⁵ – as every bit as valuable, and a good deal less dangerous, than ‘great men’ or ‘great thinkers’. “What matters is simply being human,” Camus writes in his early *Carnets*: “No, what matters is being true and then everything follows, both humanity and simplicity.”⁹⁶ A deeply egalitarian conception of justice and solidarity with our contemporaries, this side of promised political or transcendent utopias, is the primary political virtue Camus defends after 1942, circumscribed by a prohibition against murder and capital punishment:⁹⁷

The men of Europe, abandoned to the shadows, have [...] [forgotten] the present for the future, the fate of humanity for the delusion of power, the misery of the slums for the mirage of the eternal city, ordinary justice for an empty promised land [...] [but] our brothers are breathing under the same sky; justice is a living thing.⁹⁸

For Camus, it is our culture’s continuing fascination with forms of absolution that underlies the equation of lives worth living or actions worth doing exclusively with extraordinary paradigms.⁹⁹ If he were asked to define democracy, Camus reflected in 1947, he would argue that it was the practice of modesty.¹⁰⁰ Citizens in a community founded and maintained by a commitment to making collective decisions through dialogue, as opposed to prophetic or dictatorial edict, must cultivate the difficult virtue of civil toleration. This means the humility to accept that we may be wrong, and the patience to treat opponents not as foes to whom we owe neither respect nor civility, but fellows with whose reasons we may disagree, but whose right to argue them we honor.¹⁰¹ The desire to say that we and we alone are Right, so our reasons monologically

95 Camus (1970), 150–4.

96 Camus (1962), 22.

97 Camus, “La Crise de l’Homme” (2006c), 744; “Les Temps des Meurtriers” (2008b), 361; Camus (1951), 349–66; “Reflections on the Guillotine” (1960), 222–34.

98 Camus (1951), 381.

99 As so often with Camus, there are two sides here, and we need to immediately qualify that this in no way means a hostility to ethical, aesthetic, or philosophical achievement: “I feel humility, in my heart of hearts, only in the presence of the poorest lives or the greatest adventures of the mind.” Camus “Preface, 1958” to *L’envers et l’endroit*, 12. Camus in his later works speaks of the need to cultivate an aristocracy of the mind, and of labour, rooted in a sense of obligation, not entitlement. Cf. e.g. Camus “Bread and Freedom” (1960), 94–5; Camus, *Notebooks 1951–1959*, 9, 51, 91–2, 118.

100 Camus, “Démocratie et modestie” (2006c), 427; cf. “Réflexions sur une Démocratie sans Catéchisme” (2006c), 716.

101 Camus, “L’Avenir de la civilisation européenne” (2008b), 997.

should shape the lives and deaths of others, needs to be tempered by the cultivation of the arts of dialogue. This is why, around the end of the war, Socrates for Camus becomes emblematic; not simply because of his avowal of ignorance, but because of his practice of *elenchus* and the civility it supposes:

The decadence of the Greek world commenced with the assassination of Socrates. And we have killed many more Socrates' in Europe for many years now. It is a sign. It is a sign that only the Socratic spirit of indulgence towards others and rigor towards oneself [in *The Sophist*] is dangerous for civilizations given over to murder. It is thus the sole spirit that can regenerate the world.¹⁰²

On the one hand, Camus' valorisation of philosophical and ethicopolitical moderation is, he stresses, anything but the recipe for "bourgeois" complacency that he was duly charged with advocating. It requires the continuing, difficult refusal of the temptations to cede to ideological simplifications, or the kinds of absolute hopes or cynicism to which they speak – an "interminable tension and agonised serenity".¹⁰³

In 1950, excess is always a comfort, and sometimes a career. Moderation, on the one hand, is nothing but pure tension. It smiles, no doubt, and our convulsionists, dedicated to elaborate apocalypses, despise it. But its smile shines brightly at the climax of an interminable effort: it is in itself a supplementary source of strength [...]¹⁰⁴

Mélançon is closer to the mark when he speaks of a proximity to Stoicism in Camus: the classical philosophical legacy Camus explicitly identified himself with in the period following the end of World War II.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, Camus himself wrestled with the kinds of despair which finds continuing voice in popular narratives of civilizational decline. Yet "[c]ivilizations do not die so easily, and even if our world were to collapse, it would not be the first," he reflects.¹⁰⁶ Above all, it is the examples of "thoughtful strength and the intelligent courage

102 Camus, "La Crise de L'Homme" (2006c), 746; cf. "Les Temps des Meurtriers," (2008b), 364. Cf. Camus (1951), 354.

103 Camus (1951), 378. Cf. Camus (2008a), 15. Cf. Mélançon (1976), 36, 56, 172, 177, 221.

104 Camus (1951), 375.

105 Camus, "Interventions à la table ronde de 'Civilisation'" (2006c), 682.

106 Camus, "Almond Trees," 135–6.

I still feel in some of the people I know"¹⁰⁷ that prevent Camus from joining the ranks of those who, admiring the ancients, scorn the "single and radiant point of the present" in which alone we can live and act.¹⁰⁸

Despite Camus' reputation for "grim thoughts",¹⁰⁹ nevertheless (and again following the Stoic model), Camus' defence of the virtues does not exclude a concern for happiness, nor resolve itself into a dour-faced rejection of art, love, admiration, and joy. Although he felt as if he needed almost to apologise for this in his contemporary France, Camus' mature philosophy is eudemonistic.¹¹⁰ Without for one moment ceding a concern for social justice, he writes in 1959: "I am tempted to believe that it is necessary to be strong and happy in order to aid those who are unhappy."¹¹¹ "Forsaking beauty and the sensual happiness attached to it, exclusively serving misfortune, calls for a nobility I lack," he reflected in 1954's "Return to Tipasa".¹¹² Justice pursued to the exclusion of the "thirst for love and to admire"¹¹³ leads to new forms of oppression: notably, in the censorship of artistic creation and freedom of expression practiced by total states. Perhaps the arch-opposition in Camus' ethics, indeed, lies in the competing demands of an extramoral sense of beauty, associated by him with love, wonder, the natural world and artistic creation, and "a fierce love of justice" which he had called in his resistance writings an "[...] obstinate refusal [...] to accept any order that seeks to bring men to their knees."¹¹⁴ "Whatever may be the difficulties of the undertaking," Camus' *spoudaios* should strive, as "Return to Tipasa" depicts Camus himself re-motivating himself to strive, to "never to be unfaithful either to one or to the other."¹¹⁵

So it is to Camus' literary modernism, and its debt to classical paradigms, that we should now finally turn.

107 Camus, "Prometheus in the Underworld" (2006c) 141.

108 Camus (1951), 381.

109 Solomon (2006).

110 Cf. Camus, "Interview non publiée" (2006c), 481–2. "When I do happen to look for what is most fundamental in me, what I find is a taste for happiness." Camus "Three Interviews" (1968), 351.

111 Camus, "Pourquoi je fais du theatre" (2008), 604. Camus repeats that his aim is to serve life and *bonheur*, as at "Entretiens sur la révolte" 401.

112 Camus, "Return to Tipasa" (1968), 165.

113 Camus, "Return to Tipasa" (1968), 168.

114 Camus (2006), 42.

115 Camus, "Return to Tipasa" (1968), 169–70.

Camus' Literary Philhellenism: *Mythopoiesis*, Neoclassicism and Style

Perhaps the clearest dimension of Camus' classical reception lies in the form of his *oeuvre*, not its philosophical content. As French classicist Pierre Hadot has done much recently to emphasise, ancient philosophers wrote in a host of what we today call "literary" genres *verbotten* in contemporary academia: from the poems of a Parmenides or Lucretius, to dialogues, memorabilia, hymns, letters, or Seneca's tragedies. Recovering a sensitivity at the heart of the longstanding rhetorical tradition at the heart of renaissance humanism,¹¹⁶ Hadot sees this diversity of "language games" as reflective of ancient authors' awareness of the need to address different audiences in diverse literary forms tailored to their capacities and interests, particularly given the ancient philosophical aim to ethically form, as well as intellectually inform, these audiences.¹¹⁷ Camus' "Helen's Exile" observes the same difference between modern academic and ancient philosophy: "Whereas Plato contained everything – nonsense, reason, and myth – our philosophers contain nothing but nonsense or reason because they have closed their eyes to the rest. The mole is meditating."¹¹⁸ His *Carnets* suggest from very early on Camus' desire to speak to and to move wider, non-scholarly audiences; a choice which governs his continuing philosophical identification as an artist: "people can only think in images [...] if you want to be a philosopher, write novels."¹¹⁹

Camus' classical reception touches at least three registers of his literary creation. First, from 1938, Camus became enamoured of classical mythology: that cultural phenomenon "in which I am most at ease," as he commented in interview.¹²⁰ Certainly, as Crochet in particular has documented, Camus' *oeuvre* – both philosophical and literary – is dotted with classical (as well as biblical) myths: Sisyphus, Oedipus, Prometheus, Orpheus and Eurydice, Antigone and Polyneices, Demeter and Persephone, and Nemesis.¹²¹ The invaluable *Carnets* from 1938 begin to explain why. Camus was attracted to the notion that the Greek mythical narratives involve "a denial of time of the strongest intensity."¹²²

116 See for an instance of this tradition from the beginning of the 17th century, Bacon (1605), book II, chapters XVI–XVII.

117 See especially Hadot (1996), 49–70.

118 Camus, "Helen's Exile" (1968), 151.

119 Camus (1962), 23.

120 Camus (1964), 317.

121 Crochet (1973).

122 Camus (1962), 100–1.

The characterisations or actions in the ancient myths, while set “once upon a time,” set out to address eternally recurrent mysteries and issues facing each new generation of human beings (the origins of the world, political relations, sexual difference, suffering, mortality...). Mythical creations for Camus, in this way, are so many living affronts to the “detestable” historicist view he assigns to Hegel¹²³ (and which we saw above he sees as underlying the fascist and Stalinist ideologies) that the lives, thought and literature of any given time are wholly the products of their particular historical times.

It is this sense of the abiding relevance of the West’s inherited myths – “made for the imagination to breathe life into them”¹²⁴ with each new generation – that shapes Camus’ recourse to the myth of Sisyphus to frame his meditations on the absurd, and that of Prometheus for his work on modern revolt. Each of us, as mortals, faces analogues to the fate of Sisyphus as Camus asks us to envisage him. For Camus, this chastened god is our contemporary, and it is as a source of ethical inspiration that Camus asks us at the book’s close to “imagine Sisyphus happy.”¹²⁵ All of Europe, collectively, has lived through the drama of two centuries of revolutionary convulsions against divinely-ratified and human injustice. This drama at once echoes Prometheus’ revolt against Zeus on behalf of humanity, and (Camus argues) betrays the classical Titans’ defence of both technology and art, justice and liberty, and “his admirable determination to separate and exclude nothing,” from which we can still learn.¹²⁶

In the 1950s, Camus would reflect that his aim in both *L’Étranger* (1941) and *La Peste* (1947), comparably, was a form of his own *mythopoeisis*: “above all [I am] an artist who creates myths to the measure of his passion and of his anguish [...]”¹²⁷ Camus not only interlaces classical mythical motifs (Oedipus in *L’Étranger*; Orpheus in *La Peste*) into these narratives, as he does in the lyrical essays of *Noces* and *L’Été*. His choice of a timeless theme in each (a scapegoat condemned to die, a city struck by an epidemic), as well as the sparse prose in which each of our narrators (Meursault, Rieux) suppress nearly all explanatory rationalisations of the successive events,¹²⁸ are each intended to

123 Camus, “La crise de l’homme” (2006c), 741.

124 Camus (1942), 164.

125 Camus (1942), 168; on the deliberately paradoxical reworking of the myth, see Audin (2007), 67–79.

126 Camus, “Prometheus in the Underworld” (2006c), 142. In the same manner, beneath their apparently desultory surface, Camus’ four essays in the collection *Noces* are framed in the opening and closing pieces by references to the Eleusinian mystery cult. Cf. Camus, “Love of Life,” 56; “Nuptials at Tipasa,” 68; “The Desert,” 97–8, 104.

127 Camus, quoted at Scher, (2011), 12.

128 On this point in *L’Étranger*, see Sartre (1968), 24–41.

invest the words and action with the uncanny *gravitas* that undoubtedly goes some way to explaining these works' continuing classic status.¹²⁹

The second register of Camus' literary classicism, one which perhaps sets him farthest from the more formal experiments of other literary modernists, concerns his style. From the first, Camus was charmed by classical theatre in particular. His *Carnets* record at what points in his life (notably during the war) Camus was reading the classical historians, dramatists, and philosophers.¹³⁰ Camus' *Caligula*, arguably his most successful play, drew directly from Suetonius, whom he had studied under Jean Grenier;¹³¹ and like *Le Malentendu* and *Les Justes*, it is clear that Camus hoped that these dramas would answer that call he duly made in 1955 in Athens for a regenerated classical theatre.¹³² In the case of *La Peste*, as Archambault has stressed, we know that Camus took as his classical model for Rieux's chronicling Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*: in particular, the latter's account of the devastating Athenian plague.¹³³

In a late interview, Camus avowed his own literary classicism: if by that label we mean "a romanticism brought under control."¹³⁴ Probably the key statement of this aesthetic – alongside the list of modern authors led by Gide, Tolstoy, du Gard, Silone and others Camus wrote in admiration of – is the 1942 essay "Intelligence and the Scaffold." In this piece, Camus outs himself an unashamed admirer of "a certain classical tradition in the French novel":¹³⁵ and while it is this modern tradition in French letters Camus describes, each of its features evokes the measured restraint of the classical authors.¹³⁶ These features bespeak "an ideal of simplicity"¹³⁷ – indeed, an "Apollonian perfection of form"¹³⁸ – in which nothing is belaboured, but "everything is reduced to its essentials".¹³⁹ The novelists of this tradition hone in always, Camus argues, on a

129 Crochet (1973), 121–46, 162–92.

130 Cf. Bousquet "Note Annex" (1977), at 112–3, which lists all entries on classical thought and literature in the *Carnets*.

131 On Caligula's classical setting, and Camus' opposition of Rome (excess, tyranny, martial valour) with the Greeks, see Richardson (2012), 66–89.

132 See especially Teubelsi (2007), 95–105.

133 Archambault (1972), 54–62.

134 Camus, "Three Interviews" (1968), 353.

135 Camus, "Intelligence and the Scaffold" (1968), 210.

136 Cf. Camus, "Preface" to *L'envers et l'endroit*, 15.

137 Camus, "Intelligence and the Scaffold" (1968), 211.

138 Camus, "Intelligence and the Scaffold" (1968), 213.

139 Camus, "Intelligence and the Scaffold" (1968), 211.

certain key preoccupations, around which their narratives turn.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, their “rigor, purity, and [...] concentrated force”¹⁴¹ of expression does not indicate an anaesthetic lack of passion. On the contrary, “a great part of the genius of the French novel lies in the conscious effort to give the order of pure language to the cries of pure passion.”¹⁴² The author of *Le Princesse de Cleves*, Camus argues, is able to better convey her anguish at disappointed romantic love in clipped, “disciplined” sentences describing the misfortunes of her characters than in drawn out, first person confessions or psychological explorations.

What is involved in such classicism is instead “deliberate choices (*parti pris*)”, Camus stresses: “the stubborn clinging to a certain tone” before even the most extreme events of life.¹⁴³ Style here is as such a deliberate practice of imposing aesthetic limits on what needs to be said. It anticipates the kind of measured selection, and deliberate omission, of parts of reality that *L’Homme Révolté* will argue is essential to great art, midway between formalist and realistic excesses:¹⁴⁴ “a studied art that owes everything to intelligence and its attempts to dominate” the passions, the dispersion of life, and the medium of language.¹⁴⁵

Hence we approach the final, third register of Camus’ literary classicism. This is the sense that the activity of literary creation, because of the disciplines of observation and expression it imposes upon the artist, is:

[...] a school for life, [...] precisely because it is a school of art. To be more accurate, the lesson of these lives and these works of art is no longer simply one of art, but one of style. We learn from them to give our behaviour a certain form.¹⁴⁶

Camus remained fascinated throughout his career with the lives of artists, as each involving such an exhausting discipline of confronting one’s passions and illusions, and forming them into ordered works. “Works of art are not born in flashes of inspiration, but in a daily fidelity” or “discipline,” “Intelligence and the Scaffold” concludes.¹⁴⁷ The closing part of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, published

140 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 213.

141 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 217.

142 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 212.

143 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 217.

144 Camus (1951), 334–45.

145 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 215.

146 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 216.

147 Camus, “Intelligence and the Scaffold” (1968), 219.

in the same year, examines the persona of the artist (alongside the actor, the conqueror, the Don Juan) as a style of life lived lucidly in the face of the absurd: "Of all the schools of patience and lucidity," Camus suggests, surely confessing his own vocation:

[...] creation is the most effective [...] It calls for a daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimation of the limits of truth, measure, and strength [...] perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity it provides him of overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality.¹⁴⁸

It is possible to argue, indeed, that an entire register of Camus' *Carnets*, which he kept faithfully from 1935 until his death in 1960, is a document in what Michel Foucault has called "self-writing,"¹⁴⁹ attesting to Camus' ongoing attempts to give himself such a discipline, and to cultivate over time that kind of lucidity his philosophical texts valorise.¹⁵⁰ Camus never claimed that status of "Saint without God" – or perhaps classical *sage* – which admirers have given him, and which he depicted as inspiring his Tarrou in *La Peste*.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, one basis of his enduring appeal – outside of the beauty of his prose, the gravity of the problems he considered, and the humane seriousness that everywhere characterises his voice – lies in Camus' classical sense that philosophy and literature, as well as producing books, aim at shaping people, faced with the tasks of living well despite the prejudices, temptations, and hazards that beset us. It is to the classical voice of a Marcus Aurelius, in the like business of forming himself, that Camus is accordingly closest when he enjoins in himself in the *Carnets* the kind of *eunoia* which he thought alone might make possible a second renaissance, if enough people could be moved to pursue it:

Remain close to the reality of beings and things. Return as often as possible to personal happiness [...] Recover energy – as the central force. Recognise the need for enemies. Love that they exist [...] Recover the greatest strength, not to dominate but to give.¹⁵²

148 Camus (1942), 156.

149 See Foucault, "Self Writing" at <http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.hypomnemata.en.html>, accessed October 2014.

150 Cf. Sharpe (2013) 1149–64.

151 Camus (1970), 276.

152 Camus (2008), 204.

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A Modernist Poet Alludes to an Ancient Historian: George Seferis and Thucydides

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Eliot's statement "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal," together with his notion of the "historical sense," have been central themes in scholarship on the so-called "high" modernist allusive practice.² George Seferis (1900–1971), a major Greek modernist poet and 1963 Nobel laureate, was at pains to repeat and explain in his essays the above phrases by Eliot, often combining them with the notion of the "historical poet" of the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy.

Seferis's own allusive practice and his relationship to history, also in connection with his professional career as a diplomat, have received special attention in numerous studies on his work. In them allusions to ancient authors, particularly poets, have pride of place.³ This chapter examines Seferis's engagement with an ancient historian: Thucydides, the author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, a destructive war among the Greeks fought from 431 to 404 BCE (Thucydides's work remained unfinished, covering the years until 411 BCE).

Thucydides's reception has been a newly expanding field of research, mainly in relation to historical and political thought.⁴ Yet the exploration of

¹ This article was based on a lecture given at Oxford University and subsequently published in the journal *Κ. Περιοδικό κριτικής, λογοτεχνίας και τεχνών* 10 (2006), 82–96.

The following abbreviations are used for Seferis: *D*1–3 = *Δοκίμεις*, 3 vols. (1974, 1992); *M*1–6, *Μέρες* (1975–1986); *P* = *Ποιήματα* (1977); *6N* = *Ἐξί νύχτες στην Ακρόπολη* (1974). I use the following translations, with small changes: Thucydides (2009) and Seferis (1995). All other translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. The numbers in parentheses refer to the numeration of Seferis's lines in Greek. For biographical details, Beaton (2003) is an indispensable source.

² See Bush (1991), 138; Longenbach (1987a), 176–188, and Longenbach (1987b).

³ On Seferis's allusive practice in relation to Eliot, see in particular Williams (1997). For recent studies, see e.g. Tambakaki (2013), 144–65, and Liapis (2014), 74–103.

⁴ For a recent exception to the rule, see Morley (2012): 20–47. For an overview of Thucydides's reception, see Hornblower (2010), 935–7; Harloe and Morley (2012); Lee and Morley (2014). On Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight*, see Hornblower (2008), 733, in relation to Thucydides's chapters on the slaughter in the river Assinaros (Thuc. 7. 84; see also below).

his presence in novelists and poets is stimulating and challenging *vis-à-vis* both each writer's "historical sense" and the old question of the relationship between literature and history. George Seferis is one such case.

Seferis and Modernist Allusive Practice, Cavafy's "historical poet" and Eliot's "historical sense"

In modern Greek literature, the notion of the "historical poet" is inextricably linked with C. P. Cavafy (1863–1933), who stated famously: "I am an historical poet (ποιητής ιστορικός). I could never write a novel or a play. But I hear inside me 125 voices telling me that I could write a history book."⁵ History was a pervasive theme in Cavafy's poetry, the background or the foreground of his "three principal concerns," in W. H. Auden's words: "love, art, and politics in the original Greek sense."⁶ Auden himself was a poet with a special interest in history, who provided us with one of the most famous references to Thucydides by name in modern poetry: the section starting with the phrase "Exiled Thucydides knew" in his poem "September 1, 1939," on the outbreak of the Second World War.

Seferis gave his own explanation of how he conceived of the Cavafian "historical poet" in his lecture "C. P. Cavafy-T. S. Eliot: Parallels" (1946). He stressed "the feeling of temporal identification, where the past is fused with the present and perhaps with the future," and drew an analogy between Eliot and Cavafy hinged on their relationship to history: "[...] I think that the expression 'historical poet' in no way means the poet who also writes historical texts or writes history in verse. If the word 'poet' has any meaning at all, it means a man who has the historical sense."⁷

Already in his first published essay, "Introduction to T. S. Eliot" (1936), Seferis referred to Eliot's "historical sense" in connection to his allusive practice: "The third singularity of Eliot is also connected with his historical sense. It relates to the quotations or the paraphrases from foreign texts one comes across in almost all his poems."⁸ Seferis explained that "with this technical peculiarity

5 Lechonitis (1977), 19–20. Cf. D1.340. For different approaches to the question of Cavafy and history, see e.g. Dallas (1974); Pieris (2008), 397–411; Kayialis (1998), 77–119; Beaton (1983), 23–44; Ricks (1988), 169–83; Bowersock (2009).

6 Auden (1961).

7 D1.335, 340. On Seferis as an "historical poet," see Paschalis (2010), 488–512; Mackridge (2008), 359–80; Tambakaki (2008): 218–36; Lavagnini (1998), 107–22.

8 D1.41 [Translations in Matthias (2009), 158]. Cf. D1.42–3: "The poet must provide and constantly develop the consciousness of the past as present." Matthias (2009), 158.

[...] [Eliot's] dominant, personal tone, carries along with it other voices as well, harmonized with it and colored through it, independent though these voices may remain."⁹ According to Seferis, allusions worked thus as a sort of "agreed insinuations" between readers, "playing the role of mythology, even for a restricted audience."¹⁰ And he did not fail to quote Eliot's own definition of the "historical sense" in the influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919):

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.¹¹

The placing of Homer at the beginning of the Western literary tradition and the attention a poet should pay to the capacity of words "to insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilization" (again in Eliot's words) was a great challenge for Seferis in his quest for a "proper modern colloquial idiom" as a Greek poet.¹² In his Nobel lecture he would say:

I have not spoken to you of the ancients. Perhaps I should add a few words. Since the fifteenth century [...] they have been integrated into what we have come to call, in brief, European civilization. [...] There are however certain things that have remained inalienable to us. When I read in Homer the simple words *φάος ἡλιόιο* – today I would say *φως του ἡλίου*, the sunlight – I experience a familiarity that is akin to a collective soul rather than to an intellectual effort. It is a note, one might say, whose

9 D1.42; Matthias (2009), 158.

10 D1.43; Matthias (2009), 158. On the expression "agreed insinuations," see D1.147.

11 Eliot (1999), 14. Eliot's first explanation of the term "historical sense" comes from his 1918 "Note on Ezra Pound," in which he reflected on the modern "thickening of conscious, orchestrated allusions"; in the words of A. Walton Litz, (1991), 138: "A large part of any poet's 'inspiration' must come from his reading and from his knowledge of history. I mean history widely taken; any cultivation of the historical sense, of perception of our position relative to the past, and in particular of the poet's relation to poets of the past. [...] This perception of relation involves an organized view of the whole course of European poetry from Homer."

12 T. S. Eliot (1957), 33, 38.

harmonics reach quite far; it feels very different from anything a translation can give.¹³

By reading the Homeric phrase in modern Greek pronunciation, at the same time providing its modern Greek translation/equivalent, Seferis showed in fact how he conceived of Eliot's "historical sense" in relation to the Greek language. This is also evident in the way he cited or alluded to ancient Greek texts in his poetry,¹⁴ where rarely are phrases quoted in the original. More often than not, it is the modern Greek equivalent that pointed to an ancient source, as in the lines from "Agianapa I," where Seferis alluded precisely to Homer's *φάος ἡελίοιο*: "And you see the light of the sun, as the ancients used to say. [...] Strange, here I see the light of the sun. The gold net" ("*Και βλέπεις το φως του ἡλίου καθώς ἔλεγαν οι παλαιοί. [...] Παράξενο, το βλέπω εδῶ το φως του ἡλίου· το χρυσό δίχτυ*").¹⁵ In his allusions to Thucydides, Seferis followed a similar practice.

The relationship of a poet to history has of course some more circumscribed, as it were, sides, one of them being the question of the poet as a reader of historical texts.¹⁶ Looking into a poet's library is always helpful in our dealing with the question, at least as a starting point. In Seferis's library history books abound (we should not forget that it is also the library of a diplomat), many of them bearing handwritten notes. Categories under which his books have been classified are: Ecclesiastical history; memoirs; ancient Greek and Roman history; Byzantine and modern Greek history; European history; Asian history; American history. To them one must add the archaeological and travel books.¹⁷ Thucydides's *History* appears in various editions and translations, among them those of Eleftherios Venizelos's (1937–1940) and Rex Warner's (1954) (see also below). Interestingly though Venizelos's translation is the earliest edition/translation of Thucydides found in Seferis's library. As we will see, this is inconsistent with Seferis's longstanding involvement with Thucydides, which had started undoubtedly in the 1920s.

It should be noted that although the association of Seferis's writing with historical events and experiences is evident and powerful, direct references to historical texts are sparse in his poems. Most of these references are found in

13 D3.166–7.

14 Cf. Eliot's (and Pound's) practice of incorporating "any number of foreign-language citations and allusions into their texts" (among them ancient Greek), Perloff (2002), 64.

15 Seferis "Agianapa I," lines 1, 14.

16 Cf. Jusdanis (1987), 119: "Cavafy's work is to some extent a manifestation of the library from which it stems and about which it speaks."

17 Giannadakis (1989).

his collection *Logbook III* (1955), which was dedicated “To the people of Cyprus, Love and Memory” and bore the more “historical” title *Cyprus, where it was decreed . . . 1953* in its first drafts.¹⁸ In this collection Cavafy is present more than in any other, and one finds acknowledged allusions, for example, to Herodotus and Leontios Machairas or to *Excerpta Cypria* (a collection of texts on the history of Cyprus, published in 1908), as well as to Thucydides.

Acknowledged Allusions and Explicit References to Thucydides in Seferis’s Poetry and Prose

Poetry

Unlike Auden’s “September 1, 1939,” Thucydides does not appear by name in Seferis’s poetry, and all of the allusions that have been acknowledged in the notes to the poems (either by Seferis himself¹⁹ or the editor, G. P. Savidis) relate to books 6 and 7 of the *History*, known as the *Sikelika*. There Thucydides deals with the Athenian expedition to Sicily in 415–413 BCE, which started with high hopes for the conquest of Sicily and ended up with a total catastrophe.

More particularly Seferis’s allusions revolve around the dire fate which befell the captured Athenians and allies in the quarries of Syracuse, where most of them were sent after the defeat, as depicted in the very last paragraph of the *Sikelika*: “The prisoners in the quarries (ἐν ταῖς λιθοτομίαις) were harshly treated by the Syracusans in the early days of their captivity [. . .].” Immediately after this phrase, Thucydides rounds off his description of the catastrophe:

This proved the most significant occurrence in the whole of this war, and, it seems to me, in the whole of recorded Greek history – unparalleled triumph for the victors, and unparalleled disaster for the vanquished. This was utter destruction, as the saying goes (πανωλεθρία δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον). Beaten in every way on every front, extreme miseries suffered on an extreme scale, and army, fleet, and everything else destroyed, few out of all those many made their return home.²⁰

“*The Last Day*.” Seferis alluded to the Sicilian quarries for the first time in his poetry in “The Last Day,” a poem bearing the indication “Athens, Feb. ’39,”

18 Pieris (2004), 401.

19 As a sort of “Glossary,” only aimed at providing clarifications of “the use I made of specific words”, as Seferis said in the 1950 edition of his poems (P310).

20 Thuc. 7.87.5

although it was written one year earlier.²¹ The clouds of the Second World War were gathering on the horizon, and the Metaxas dictatorship had been imposed in Greece since 1936 (among other things, banning Pericles's "Funeral Oration" from Thucydides's *History*).²² Seferis's poem castigated, in D. N. Maronitis's words, "the pseudo-heroic trap which usually uses ancient symbols and stock-in-trade ways of talking about heroism: the religious and patriotic veils of self-sacrifice."²³

The following dawn nothing would be left to us, everything surrendered,
even our hands,
and our women slaves at the springheads and our children
in the quarries.²⁴

Unlike Thucydides, in Seferis's poem, there were "our children," not soldiers, who would be sent to the quarries (*λατομεία*, the modern Greek word for the ancient Greek word *λιθοτομιαί*). This was a composite allusion, in which Thucydides was bound up with Homer. As Seferis indicated in the notes to the poem, the phrase "and our women slaves at the springheads" alluded to the phrase *καί κεν ὕδωρ φορέοις Μεσσηϊδος ἢ Ὑπερείης* (*Il.* 6.457) from the scene of Hector-Andromache (and their little son, Astyanax) in book 6 of the *Iliad*.²⁵ There Hector foretold the fate of slavery that awaited his wife after the fall of his city, Troy.

"Blind." Seferis would return to the theme of the Sicilian quarries after the end of the Second World War, when in Greece the civil war had broken out. In a poem he wrote in his diary in December 1945 (that is, in the period between what is known as the "second" and "third" rounds of the civil war), Thucydides appears again in a composite nexus of allusions. The poem would later be included in the posthumous collection *Book of Exercises II* under the title "Blind." The Sicilian quarries are combined with another historical event in modern Greek history, together with a mythical event: on the one hand, the selling of the town of Parga by the British to Ali Pasha (1817–1819), and, on the other, the deadly clash between Oedipus's sons, Eteocles and Polynices, as treated in ancient tragedy (especially Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes*):

21 On the poem's allusions to ancient war texts, its dateline, and the fact that it had been subject to censorship, see Tambakaki (2008).

22 For Seferis's references to the fact, see *D3.34* and *M4.197*.

23 Maronitis (2007), 124.

24 "The Last Day," lines 23–5.

25 On the reception of the scene, see Zajko (2006), 80–91.

Sleep is heavy on December mornings.
 And each December is worse than the one before.
 One year there was Parga the other Syracuse
 [...] quarries
 full of wretched, breathless men
 and the blood is bought, and the blood is sold
 and the blood is divided like the children of Oedipus,
 and the children of Oedipus are dead.²⁶

“The most horrific experience was the civil war,” Seferis would tell Eliot in 1952, three years after the end of the Greek civil war.²⁷ It is not hard to imagine Seferis during the years of fratricidal bloodshed harking back not only to the wretched captives of the Sicilian catastrophe, but also to the *History of the Peloponnesian War* in its entirety – the archetypal historical narrative of an “internal war.”²⁸

“Euripides the Athenian.” The last time Seferis would return to the Sicilian quarries in his poetry would be in the collection *Logbook III*, with the poem “Euripides the Athenian.” This was a sort of epitaph for the Greek tragedian, which opened with the phrases:

He grew old between the fires of Troy
 and the quarries of Sicily.²⁹

As in “The Last Day,” in this poem too an allusion to Thucydides is combined with the Trojan War, this time through Euripides. Suffice it to remember Euripides’s tragedies *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, and *The Trojan Women*, all dealing with the fate of the women of Troy after the fall of the city, a fate foretold by Hector in Book 6 of the *Iliad* (see above).

However in the first version of the poem, written in the first person singular, we read:

26 *M5*,24 lines 12–7 (entitled “Theophilos”). For the trans. and other references to ancient authors, see Liapis (2014), 6–9.

27 *D2*,194.

28 See also the memorable description of the civil war in Corcyra in 427 BCE, Th. 3.69–85; Price (2001).

29 For investigations of *Logbook III*, see: Savidis (1961), 304–408; Pontani (1962), 58–62; Papazoglou (2002); Krikos-Davis (2002). On the presence of Cavafy in the collection, see: Vagenas (1979); Mackridge (2008), 359–80 (“Ο καβαφικός Σεφέρης”). Also Maronitis (2007), 155–69. On “Euripides the Athenian,” see Kokolis (1982), and Kakridis (1979) 319–34.

It is true, Troy preoccupied me a lot –
 Troy and women.
 I grew old between that fire
 and the flute-women of Lysander.³⁰

The substitute for “the flute-women of Lysander” with the Thucydidean quarries is important for the poem’s interpretive perspectives, also posing the question of where exactly Seferis found this “small and insignificant” historical detail (to use Cavafy’s famous phrase from the poem “Caesarion”), which triggered his poetic sensitivity. The “flute-women of Lysander” might come either from Xenophon’s *Hellenica* (2.2.23) (narrating the last seven years of the Peloponnesian War, which were not covered by the unfinished *History* by Thucydides) and/or from Plutarch’s *Life of Lysander* (15.4). Both authors describe the way in which the Athenian walls were pulled down in the spring of 404 BCE to the sounds of flute-women.³¹

It is also worth noting that the choice of the Thucydidean quarries over “the flute-women of Lysander” was made at around the same period when Seferis decided on the poem’s title in its final version.³² “Euripides the Athenian” easily brings to mind the opening phrase of the *History*: “Thucydides the Athenian wrote this history of the war fought against each other by the Peloponnesians and the Athenians.”³³

It is not difficult to explain this composite allusion to both Thucydides and Euripides.³⁴ Euripides’s age (as portrayed, for example, in Gilbert Murray’s classic study *Euripides and his Age*, which is found in Seferis’s library with signs of reading by the poet) was the period of Athens’s heyday after the Persian Wars, but also the period of the Peloponnesian War. When Euripides died in Macedonia a couple of years before the war ended, the tradition has it that Thucydides (who seems to be two decades younger than Euripides) wrote the well-known epitaph in his honor:

30 Kokolis (1982), 63–6 and Kakridis (1979), 326–8.

31 For a passing reference by Seferis to Xenophon, see *D*1.187. See also Seferis (1991), 116 (letter dated “26 July 1959”): “I have been reading about the last years of the Peloponnesian War [...] I wondered once more how Euripides came to be involved in the poems of Cyprus. I think now that he was rightly involved.” It must be noted that *Hellenica* appears in Seferis’s library only in a 1966 edition. Plutarch’s *Lives* are found in a 1937 edition bearing handwritten notes.

32 Kokolis (1982), 74.

33 Thuc. 1.1.1.

34 For a classic study on the relationship between Euripides and Thucydides, see Finley (1967), 1–54.

All Hellas is the tomb of Euripides, but his bones rest in the land of Macedon for it was there that he died. His home was Athens, the Hellas of Hellas. [...] ³⁵

Euripides's *The Trojan Women* in particular was first performed at the City Dionysia in March 415 BCE, a few months after the subjugation of the island of Melos by the Athenians, the killing of all adult male population and the enslavement of women and children. The destruction of Melos took place just prior to the Sicilian expedition and was described in the famous "Melian dialogue" in Thucydides (5.84–116). Moreover, Plutarch's *Life of Nicias* reports that Euripides wrote the epitaph for those who lost their lives in the Sicilian expedition (17.4), and that some Athenians were actually saved because they knew and recited by heart his verses: such was the "yearning fondness", Plutarch says, for Euripides's poetry by the Sicilians (29.3–5).³⁶ As we will see, the poem "Euripides the Athenian" was not the only case in which Seferis combined Thucydides with Euripides.

Prose Writing

Six Nights on the Acropolis. In his only completed novel, *Six Nights on the Acropolis*, published in 1974 three years after his death, Seferis made an explicit reference to Thucydides's Sicilian quarries, combining it with both Euripides and Homer. On the novel's first pages, the protagonist Stratis asks: "Have you read Thucydides? Do you remember the Athenians in the Sicilian quarries?" Immediately afterwards, he refers to Euripides and Homer. "Those men knew Euripides by heart," he adds.³⁷ And:

[...] during the time I was living abroad, shut up in my room where the sun never shone and without a fire [...] whenever I could no longer endure the cold I would pick up the *Iliad* and read the sixth book [...]³⁸

As we saw, in book 6 of the *Iliad* there is the scene Hector-Andromache (and Astyanax), to which Seferis alludes in the poem "The Last Day."

The composite reference to Thucydides-Euripides-Homer in *Six Nights* is important not least because the history of the writing of the novel bridges two periods in Seferis's life: on the one hand, the decade before the publication of

35 *Anthologia Palatina* 7.45.

36 For a poetic treatment of the theme of Euripides in Sicily see Robert Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure*.

37 6N.23 [21]. See above for this detail from Plutarch's *Nicias*. It must be noted however that Seferis eschewed the "salvational" function of this knowledge of Euripides.

38 6N.24 [21]. See Tambakaki (2008).

Seferis's first collection, *Turning Point* (1931), and, on the other, the period of the writing of *Logbook III*, in which the poem "Euripides the Athenian" belongs. In the notes to the novel's manuscripts, Seferis spoke of two periods of working on it: the first in Athens, around the years 1926–1928, and the second, and final one, in Beirut, from January to mid-August 1954. But he affirmed: "I tried to remain faithful to my writings from those years [1926–1928] and exclude ideas and feelings that might have been inspired by people and situations after 1930."³⁹

The novel is situated around 1928, a period also covered by the first volume of Seferis's diaries, *Days I* (1925–1931). In fact whole pages of the novel are almost identical to pages from *Days I* (which was also published posthumously, in 1975, one year after *Six Nights*). Among other elements, the novel's protagonist, Stratis, also shared with Seferis his origin from Asia Minor and his student years in Paris. Stratis had studied in "the glorious city of Paris" and "hail[ed] from the Ionian city of Klazomenai,"⁴⁰ the ruins of which are situated in the costal village of Urla in modern Turkey. Seferis was born in Smyrna (Izmir, in modern Turkey) in western Anatolia in 1900 and lived there until 1914, when his family moved to Athens. And Vourlá, as was the Greek name of Urla, was the place of his childhood summers, a sort of paradise whose memory would remain with him all his life. In 1918 Seferis went to Paris to study law, and stayed there for the next six years. It was there that in September 1922 the news came of the great fire of Smyrna, which would become the iconic image of what is known in Greek as the "Asia Minor Catastrophe," the disastrous conclusion of the 1919–1922 Greek campaign in Asia Minor. For the young Seferis this also meant the loss of his homeland. As he would say later in his life, the Asia Minor Catastrophe was the event "which affected me above all others."⁴¹

When Seferis returned to Athens in 1925 the signs of a post-Asia Minor Catastrophe era were evident everywhere in the capital of the Greek state, now also a city of refugees from Anatolia, and the need for a redefinition of the Greek identity was more urgent than ever. In this quest, the glorious ancient Greek past as encapsulated in the ruins of the Acropolis (or "the legacy of our immortal ancestors," in the ironic words of one of the novel's characters⁴²) was inevitably a central point of reference. Revolving around six visits

39 6N.255–6.

40 6N.31 [27]. On Seferis's literary personas (Stratis or Stratis Thalassinós being one of them; on Mathios Paskalis see also below), see Menti (2007); for the relationship between M1 and *Six Nights*, see Falagkas (2008).

41 D2.355.

42 6N.27.

to the Acropolis at the time of full moon, Seferis's modernist novel focused on the developing inner world of its protagonist, Stratis, and through him, on "the sickness of Athens," as Seferis wrote.⁴³

During this period the analogies between the Athenian disaster in Sicily (as described by Thucydides), the catastrophe of Troy (as foreshadowed in the scene of Hector-Andromache in Homer, and depicted, among other works, in Euripides),⁴⁴ and the Asia Minor Catastrophe were certainly easy to draw. The fact that the politician Eleftherios Venizelos devoted the years between the Asia Minor Catastrophe and his reappearance on the political scene in 1928 to the translation of Thucydides could only have reinforced such connections.⁴⁵ Within this context, it is not difficult to imagine Seferis (like his protagonist Stratis) reading Thucydides's *Sikelika* and drawing the links Troy-Sicily-Asia Minor in the immediate post-Asia Minor Catastrophe years. We will return to these years in relation to a poem of 1928, "The letter of Mathios Paschalis." Here it is only worth adding that the bleak Thucydidean quarries on the first pages of *Six Nights* will be finally counterpointed on the novel's very final page by a deserted marble quarry portrayed in a uniquely miraculous way.⁴⁶

"Digressions on the Homeric Hymns." In his essays (known as *Dokimes*) Seferis referred again to the *Sikelika*, although not specifically to the Sicilian quarries. In 1965 in "Digressions on the Homeric Hymns," we read:

We remember the deplorable story of the mutilation of the Herms, Alcibiades and Thucydides, who is bound to tell us bitter truths until nowadays.⁴⁷

Seferis refers here to the religious-political scandal of the mutilation of the Herms (and the profanation of the Mysteries) and Alcibiades's alleged involvement in it, which affected the course of the Sicilian expedition even from the start, as we read in Thucydides (6.27–9, 60–1). And he testifies to the success of

43 Beaton (2003), 67, with references to Seferis's letters and diaries.

44 On Thucydides's description of the Sicilian disaster in evocation of the sack of Troy, see Hornblower (2011), 177 and Hornblower (2008), 745: the expression *πανωλεθρία δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον* ("utter destruction, as the saying goes"), as a telling allusion to Herodotus (2.120.5), where the word *πανωλεθρία* is used for the fall of Troy.

45 See Greenwood (2012), 157–77; Kitromilides (2006), 377–88. On the connection between the fire of Troy and that of Smyrna (modern Izmir), see Kokolis (1982), 67.

46 Beaton in "Foreword" to *6N*, xiii.

47 *D2.224–5*. There are a couple of further references to Alcibiades in Seferis's writings, reflecting his reading of both Thucydides and Plato; see *6N.16* and *D3.20*.

Thucydides's goal: to offer "a possession of all times" (κτηῖμα ἐς αἰεὶ, 1.22.4) with the word "truth" (ἀλήθεια) as its blueprint. "Most people will not take trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear," Thucydides stated at the beginning of his work (1.20), giving as an example what most people in Athens believed about the "tyrannicides" Harmodios and Aristogeiton based on oral tradition (ἄκοή). The lengthy digression aiming at the restoration of the true version of the "tyrannicides" story would be given later in his narrative, precisely on the occasion of the mutilation of the Herms: "By a detailed narrative of this affair I shall demonstrate the complete inaccuracy of all other versions, including the story which the Athenians themselves tell of their own tyrants and the event in question."⁴⁸

"The Beautiful Helen." Seferis would refer to the Sicilian expedition again in a text entitled "The Beautiful Helen" (1966) (a phrase referring to Helen of Troy from the French "La belle Hélène"). This was Seferis's answer to the question posed by the periodical *Tachydromos*: "What is the 'commonplace' that causes you the greatest malaise?" For Seferis one such commonplace was "the story of 'beautiful Helen,' as we have all learnt it from Homer, and which was reversed by Euripides."⁴⁹ Seferis focused on Euripides's *Helen*, which followed a version of the story previously presented in Stesichorus's *Palinode*, according to which it was not Helen but a phantom or *Doppelgänger* of hers who went to Troy:

The "new Helen," as Aristophanes calls it (*Thesmophoriazousai*, line 850) was performed allegedly in April 412 BCE, but Euripides [...] seems to have had it in mind at least since the Sicilian disaster, this fatal blow to the glory of Athens. [...] As for me, the "new Helen" gave me a mathematical type, I would say, of the futility and the deception of wars.⁵⁰

Although Seferis did not actually name Thucydides, the Greek historian is unquestionably present in the reference to the Sicilian disaster, if we also take into account what Seferis noted at the beginning of the text:

[...] a really wise man – whom I would call savant in the case of a historian – works under the light offered him by his age, and treads based on truths that only the passing of time can prove if they are stable or unsound – he treads, that is, based on relative truths.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Thuc. 6.54.1.

⁴⁹ *D*3.177.

⁵⁰ *D*3.178. Cf. also Herodotus's *Histories* 2.112–20.

⁵¹ *D*3.176.

Humanity and history, truth and war are central themes in Seferis's work. In fact, even his poems in which the personal tone is dominant do not fail to be anchored in history. This will be evident in two further poems, in which allusions to Thucydides are elusive, but no less powerful than in the poems in which allusions to Thucydides were acknowledged by the poet himself (see above). Interestingly, the first of these two poems goes back to 1928, that is, precisely the post-Asia Minor Catastrophe period in which Seferis's novel *Six Nights* is situated; the second comes from *Logbook III*, which also includes "Euripides the Athenian."

Elusive References: "Harmodios and Aristogeiton" and "The Rivers Swelling, Blood in Their Silt"

"Letter of Mathios Paskalis." Seferis's heterogeneous collection of poems *Book of Exercises* was published in 1940 and opened with a group of poems entitled "Poems Given." "Letter of Mathios Paskalis" was the first poem of this group. It was addressed to a woman named Verina and bore the dateline "Kokkinaras, 5 August 1928," one of the earliest in Seferis's poetry. It was published in 1940 for the first time:

Verina [...]

[...]

Remember how we used to twist breathless through the alleys so as not to be gutted by the headlights of cars.

The idea of the world abroad enveloped us and closed us in like a net and we left with a dagger hidden within us and you said "Harmodios and Aristogeiton." ["ὁ Ἀρμόδιος καὶ ὁ Ἀριστογείτων"]⁵²

Savidis's note to the last line was: "Harmodios and Aristogeiton: the tyrannicides." One can easily bring to mind the image of the heroes of democracy, as in the famous statue depicting the two men as liberators of the Athenian people from the suppression of the Peisistratids's tyranny.⁵³ But how can this image match the tone of existential crisis prevailing in the poem, which lacks any political or heroic dimension?⁵⁴

52 "Letter of Mathios Paskalis," lines 9, 14–6.

53 Manakidou (2013), 113–4, 423–4. On Harmodios and Aristogeiton as a notable exception to the rule that heroization of the recently dead was unusual at Athens, see Jones (2010), 23–4.

54 See Vagenas (1979), 116–20 and 174–5; Vitti (1989), 36–40.

Thucydides's digression on Harmodios and Aristogeiton helps us understand this reference in Seferis's poem, which in fact provides us with the image of a couple of Thucydidean readers. The shared reading of Thucydides's version of the story by Matthios and Verina is inscribed in the very atmosphere of secrecy and conspiracy that characterized their relationship, rendering this allusion to Thucydides a prime example of what Seferis meant by the phrase "agreed insinuations" between readers and between a text and its readers (see above).

As we saw, Thucydides's "restoration of the truth" about Harmodios and Aristogeiton is found in the sixth book of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. "Harmodios and Aristogeiton, ready armed with their daggers, moved forward to do the deed," writes Thucydides (6. 57. 1–2, ὁ δὲ Ἀρμόδιος καὶ ὁ Ἀριστογείτων ἔχοντες ἤδη τὰ ἐγγειρίδια ἐς τὸ ἔργον προῆσαν) about the assassination planned by them during the Panathenaia festival in the summer of 514 BCE (that is, around the same season of the year to which the dateline of the "Letter of Mathios" also points). Thucydides had already clarified that, unlike what was commonly believed, it was Hipparchos, the tyrant's brother, who was killed, and not Hippias, the tyrant himself – in other words, that Harmodios and Aristogeiton were not proper "tyrannicides"; and that the reasons for the assassination were not political, but erotic: "It was in fact the mere circumstance of a love affair which drove Aristogeiton and Harmodios to their desperate act."⁵⁵ Aristogeiton was the lover of Harmodios, "a celebrated beauty in the flower of his youth,"⁵⁶ whom Hipparchos tried unsuccessfully to seduce.

It is not only the image of Mathios and Verina as carrying "a dagger hidden within [them]" (λεπίδι was the modern Greek word used by Seferis for the ancient ἐγγειρίδιον) that points to Thucydides's digression; there is above all the erotic atmosphere of Seferis's poem, which was enhanced by Mathios's caustic stance against both intellectualism and puritanism. The "young men selling their souls in order to wear a monocle,"⁵⁷ were coupled in the following line, in a provocative image of sterility, with girls who are shrunk like some bright open sunflowers that have devoured themselves, as it were, so as to be transformed into white lilies of purity: "[...] young girls – sunflowers swallowing their heads so as to become lilies."⁵⁸

55 Thuc. 6.54.1.

56 Thuc. 6.54.2.

57 "Letter of Mathios Paskalis," line 11.

58 "Letter of Mathios Paskalis," line 12.

The whole atmosphere in the “Letter of Mathios” is reminiscent of the daring sensuality of *Six Night*,⁵⁹ in which the woman-protagonist Salome/Bilio becomes associated erotically with both Stratis and Lala, a younger woman. And like *Six Nights*, the poem is linked, on the biographical level, with the first years of Seferis’s long and secret relationship with the music-critic Loukia Fotopoulou, which lasted from 1926 to 1936. In a 1933 letter to Lou (a nickname he used for Fotopoulou) from London, Seferis wrote: “Sometimes when you speak of art [...] you remind me of the Corydon-period on that bus on Patision street.”⁶⁰ The reference to *Corydon*, the famous work on homosexuality by André Gide, is made perhaps because during that period Seferis read a lot of Gide and used to refer to him by the name of his protagonist,⁶¹ or because Lou herself might have shared the erotic behavior of Salome/Bilio in *Six Nights*.⁶² Arguably, the publication of the “Letter of Mathios” in 1940 must have also functioned as a sort of tribute to the memory of Fotopoulou, who had just died suddenly, in the late summer of 1939.⁶³

In addition to providing a challenging allusion to Thucydides and an example of the function of the “agreed insinuations,” the “Letter of Mathios Paskalis” becomes thus important for a further reason. It permits us to confirm that the reference to the Sicilian quarries in *Six Nights* has indeed its roots in the period around 1928. It provides a sound indication that when he drafted the first version of *Six Nights*, Seferis must have read at least the *Sikelika*, the part of Thucydides’s *History* in which the digression on the Harmodios and Aristogeiton is found.

“Helen.” The second poem in which an “elusive” allusion to Thucydides is detectable is one of Seferis’s most famous poems, written just prior to the second draft of *Six Nights*: “Helen,” from *Logbook III* (in which also “Euripides

59 In the novel (6N.21 [19]) there is also a reference to the 1925 French film *Feu Mathias Pascal* by Marcel L’Herbier based on the novel with the same title by Luigi Pirandello, from where Seferis’s Mathios is inspired (6N.264). Cf. M3.132.

60 M2.117.

61 M2.83 and 126. See Seferis and Lorentzatos (1990), 83: “[Gide’s] *Theseus* reminded me of the years ’25–’26, when the reading of Gide was an important part of my life and a great help.” Cf. Samouil (1998).

62 Beaton (2003), 631.

63 Beaton (2003), 173, and 150, 155, 181 and 185–6 (on the publication of the whole collection). Cf. on an earlier draft of the poem (entitled “Letter [to a woman who is away]”), Katsimbalis and Seferis (2009), i.103.

the Athenian” belongs). The poem is based on the myth of Helen as depicted in Euripides’s play *Helen*, to which Seferis referred in his essay “The Beautiful Helen,” together with references to the Sicilian expedition, the historian and truth.

The connection of Seferis’s poem with the contemporary history of Cyprus and his own personal history, especially in relation to his lost homeland in Asia Minor and the sudden and untimely death of his younger brother Angelos in 1950, has been analyzed extensively in the bibliography.⁶⁴ “Helen” was written in 1954–1955, during a crucial period for Cyprus’s struggle for self-determination. Seferis wrote in the introductory note to the collection: Cyprus was “the revelation of a world and [...] the experience of a human drama that [...] is the measure and judge of our humanity.”⁶⁵ In most of the poems of the collection, the memory of lost homeland is a recurrent theme.

Seferis’s “Helen” is a dramatic monologue by Teucer, the ancient founder of Salamis in Cyprus. As we read in its epigraph, a few lines from Euripides’ *Helen* in the original (phrases of which are repeated in the poem in their modern Greek equivalent), Apollo decreed that Teucer should live on Cyprus, founding the city of Salamis in order to remind him of his home-island, that is, Salamis in Greece. Concerning the geographical map of the poem, in addition to the two Salamises (conflated in one single reference to “another Salamis”), we have references to Cyprus and Greece; an anachronistic mention of Platres, a village on mountain Troodos on Cyprus;⁶⁶ references to the Delta of Egypt, where Teucer had encountered the real Helen; and to Troy and its river Scamander. It is on the latter that I will concentrate.

Describing how he unexpectedly encountered Helen in Egypt, Teucer says: “[...] Helen! | She whom we hunted so many years by the banks of the Scamander.”⁶⁷ And at the end of the poem, we read about a series of eponymous and anonymous people who might see once more images of destruction similar to a Scamander full of corpses:

If it’s true
that in future years some other Teucer,
or some Ajax or Priam or Hecuba,
or someone unknown and nameless who nevertheless saw

64 For “Helen,” see especially Krikos-Davis (2002), 83–98. Also Tambakaki (2011), 231–48; Paschalis (2010), 506–12.

65 P443–4.

66 On the overtones of the name, see Tambakaki (2011), 240, 246–7.

67 “Helen,” lines 26–7.

a Scamander overflow with corpses,
 isn't fated to hear
 messengers coming to tell him
 that so much suffering, so much life,
 went into the abyss
 all for an empty tunic, all for a Helen.⁶⁸

The Scamander appears also in *Six Nights*, interestingly as a metonymy of the Klazomenian protagonist: "[...] a few droplets from the Scamander, if we assume that Stratis is the River Scamander [...]." ⁶⁹ But where is Thucydides in "Helen"?

Arguably the haunting repetition in the poem of the word "truth" (*αλήθεια*; the word appears six times), in combination with a pessimistic view of history as a circle of repeated wars and suffering, might well remind us of Thucydides's historical interpretation of the phenomenon of war and human nature:

And indeed civil war did inflict great suffering on the cities of Greece. It happened then and will forever continue to happen, as long as human nature remains the same (*ἕως ἂν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ᾖ*), with more or less severity and taking different forms as dictated by each new permutation of circumstances.⁷⁰

But a specific allusion to Thucydides is detectable in another line on war destruction and suffering, this time in relation to rivers in general, and implicitly to the Scamander as well: "And the rivers swelling, blood in their silt."⁷¹ In the Greek original the line is extremely dense in its imagery (in which mud is mentioned first) and at the same time ambiguous in syntax: "*κι οἱ ποταμοὶ ρουσκῶναν μες στη λάσπη το αἶμα*."⁷²

The bloodying of the water is an almost set war image, starting from the graphic depiction of the Scamander in the *Iliad*, in which the word *αἶμα*

68 "Helen," lines 59–end.

69 *Di.28* [24].

70 Thuc. 3.82.2.

71 "Helen," line 47.

72 In the first versions of the poem, as found in Seferis's archive, this line was much more straightforward: "And the rivers swelling, full of dead | young bodies, turbid (*βουρκωμένος*) with blood." In the final version of "Helen," as we saw, the image of mud would become explicit and clear, while the word "turbid" (*βουρκωμένος*) would be used as a *hapax* in Seferis's poetry in the opening of the poem "On a Ray of Winter Light 5" from his last collection, *Three Secret Poems*: "What turbid river took us under?"

prevails.⁷³ But the specific combination of mud and blood is found specifically in Thucydides in the *Sikelika*, just before the reference to the Sicilian quarries, in the poignant description of the final slaughter of the Athenians in the river Assinaros in the summer of 413 BCE (in which “mud” appears before “blood” as in Seferis’s “Helen”):

The Peloponnesians came down the bank to the attack, and began slaughtering the Athenians, particularly those still in the river. The water quickly turned foul, blood mingling with mud (ὁμοῦ τῷ πηλῷ ἡματωμένον), but the Athenians drank on, and most fought among themselves to reach it.⁷⁴

Seferis’s wording is so close to Thucydides’s *History* that it points rather to a new reading of it by Seferis, which might have helped him crystallize the image of “the rivers swelling, blood in their silt,” as well as the closing lines of the poem, which seem to have been added in its final drafts.⁷⁵ This re-reading might also be connected to “Euripides the Athenian”: it might account for the change there of the “flute-women” into “the quarries of Sicily” and even for the choice of its very title, which was made again in the last draft, as we have seen.

The translation of Thucydides’s *History* by Seferis’s friend and translator of his poems, the classicist and novelist Rex Warner, published in 1954, must have been undeniably a strong stimulus for a new reading of Thucydides in the original.⁷⁶ It must also have reminded Seferis of Ps.-Longinus’s *On the Sublime*, a text he had known very well,⁷⁷ in which the phrases with the mingling of mud and blood from the description of the slaughter in the river Assinaros is the only quotation from Thucydides. For the writer of *On the Sublime* the phrases were an excellent example of the most effective hyperbole: “the one which conceals the very fact of its being a hyperbole [...] That a drink of mud

73 See e.g. book 21, line 21: ἐρυθαίνετο δ’ αἷματι ὕδωρ, and line 325: μορμύρων ἀφρῶ τε καὶ αἷματι καὶ νεκύεσσι. On descriptions of the battle of Salamis, see Rood (1998), 230–67.

74 Thuc. 7.84.5.

75 Pieris (2004), 411.

76 See Katsimbalis and Seferis (2009), ii.226 [letter of Seferis’s wife, Maro, to Katsimbalis, dated “20 May ’51”]: “Warner was reading George the translation of Thucydides he is preparing, in order to have his view and opinion.” And Katsimbalis and Seferis (2009), 367 [Seferis’s letter to Katsimbalis, dated “10 February ’55”: “Have you read [Warner’s] Thucydides [...]? It is a first class work.”

77 “Misquoting ‘Syracusans’ for ‘Peloponnesians’”: Hornblower (2008), 734. On Seferis’s relationship to Longinus, see Vagenas (2011), 131–42.

and gore should yet still be worth fighting for is made credible only by the height of the emotion which the circumstances arouse.”⁷⁸

Conclusion

Allusions to Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* in Seferis’s poetry serve as representative examples of how he conceived of the “historical sense.” They were often combined with allusions to other writers (mainly, Homer and Euripides), and confirmed what Seferis wrote of Cavafy in the essay “A few more on the Alexandrian poet”: an “historical poet” is the poet whom “the use of history – the sentimental/emotive (συγκινησιακή) use of history – helps express himself better.”⁷⁹

Evidence of Seferis’s long engagement with Thucydides is detected in both his prose and poetic writing at least as early as in 1928 (“Letter of Mathios Paskalis” and *Six Nights on the Acropolis*) up until 1966 (“The beautiful Helen”). We can only regret that a piece Seferis was thinking of writing, in which he would compare the language of Makriyannis with that of Thucydides (as he remarked in a letter to Zissimos Lorentzatos), was never realized.⁸⁰

Of the poetic references to Thucydides that to Harmodios and Aristogeiton in the “Letter of Mathios Paskalis” provides not only a valuable temporal signpost about Seferis’s reading of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, but also an example of the function of modernist allusion as a web of “agreed insinuations.” As readers of Thucydides, the couple Stratis-Verina shared his version of the story of Harmodios and Aristogeiton against the grain. As for the readers of Seferis’s poem itself, they need to remember not only the rough outline of the story of the “tyrannicides” as presented by Thucydides, but to have the text’s “vivid remembrance,” as Seferis says drawing an intriguing distinction between “pseudo-historical” and “truly historical” poems.⁸¹ The vivid remembrance of

78 (Ps.-Long. 38.3.7) as translated in Longinus (1995).

79 *Dr.*399. The word “συγκινησιακός” is worthy of attention. Cf. the phrase Seferis would plan to use as subtitle to his unfinished novel *Varnavas Kalostefanos* “Ένα συναισθηματικό ταξίδι στην Κύπρο” (see Seferis (2007), 20–3). Also Pamuk (2010), in relation to Friedrich Schiller’s famous essay “Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung.”

80 Seferis and Lorentzatos (1990), 83. Seferis’s letter was a sort of commentary on Lorentzatos’s study on Gide’s *Theseus* (see above), in which Lorentzatos had connected Gide’s language with those of Thucydides and Makriyannis. Seferis commented: “p. 48: Thucydides-Makriyannis – Yes, I have planned to write of Makriyannis from this perspective since long ago.”

81 *Dr.*435.

Thucydides's phrases such as: "Harmodios and Aristogeiton, ready armed with their daggers" makes "The letter of Mathios" a "truly historical" poem.

To this latter category, the poems "The Last Day," "Blind," "Euripides the Athenian," and, perhaps in the most impressive way, "Helen," also belong. In these four poems we found two images with great significance in Seferis's poetry and direct correspondences to contemporary history: the quarries of Sicily (also found in *Six Nights on the Acropolis*) and the foul rivers, full of mud and blood. The "brilliant verses" that convey these images call the reader "to stand in order to feel and follow their overtones until the end" (in Seferis's own words in relation to Luis de Gongora).⁸² These overtones go back deep into phrases from Thucydides's *History* which were memorable for their "height of the emotion" (in Ps.-Longinus's words), combining mythical and historical events, ancient and contemporary ones, the Trojan War and the Sicilian Expedition, the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Cyprus question.

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The Wisdom of Myth: Eliot's "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth"

James Nikopoulos

No examination of the reception of the Greek and Roman classics by literary modernism can ignore T. S. Eliot's 1923 review, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth." Its famous declaration that Joyce's novel utilizes the story of the *Odyssey* as a means of giving order to "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history" has been the starting point for discussions, not just of the classical legacy in early twentieth century literature, but for discussions of modernism as a whole.¹ Eliot's essay not only conditioned how we think of such paradigmatic modernist texts as *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*; it conditioned how we think of modernity, of myth, and of the ever-expanding reasons for why the two should ever have been paired together in the first place. It begs asking why.

"*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" is one of Eliot's most anthologized works of prose, and for many years, it was the most influential response to *Ulysses*.² Most if not all examinations of Joyce's novel are in some way a response to it. Perhaps this does not seem surprising, even if most critics today assert that the "mythical method" Eliot describes pertains more to his own work in *The Waste Land* than to anything Joyce had ever written. In a letter addressed to the editor of *The Dial* one month after "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" appeared, Eliot himself said that the piece was nothing to be proud of.³ To what then can we ascribe the enduring influence of such lamentable prose?

While the answer has to do, in part, with the fame of both the author and the subject of the review, we should not discount the essay's pithy wisdom either. For Eliot provides us with perhaps the most succinct description of the stereotypical idea of modernism's historical context: an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy." In doing so, the essay has helped to define an important organizing principle of the modernist era for critics. As inherently unclassifiable as modernist literature is, at the very least, we can make some sense

1 Eliot (1975), 177.

2 See Von Hendy (2001), 146.

3 Eliot and Haughton (2011), 289.

of it as a whole if we consider it to be the response to a period of history that seems to resist definitions.

In describing his times as futile and anarchic, Eliot essentially turns disorder into an organizing principle for an entire period of history. More specifically, disorder becomes the dominant aspect of contemporary history that modernism must respond to. Granted, Eliot was not the first person to have conceived of his times as chaotic. His originality lies, not so much in his assessment of the historical moment, but in his conception of the form of order he believes to be capable of counteracting the disorder of this moment. In labeling Joyce's *Odyssean* parallel a "mythical method," and in praising its ability to construct order out of disorder, Eliot transforms myth such that it becomes not just another literary device at an author's disposal but the personification of a series of values that directly apply to the modernist period overall.

That disorder should prove relevant to modernism comes as no surprise. For one, related terms like anarchy and chaos occupy prominent positions in the critical literature, including in Eliot's essay. To think of the present moment as "futile" and "anarchic" is not to think of it as an ordered stage in world history. The legacy of those first twenty years of the twentieth century, the culmination of which was the most destructive war in history, has permanently colored the modernist period with the hue of chaotic disorder. But it is not just about history. It is also about form. To many of the early reviewers of modernist literature, including to other modernist authors – Virginia Woolf comes to mind –, modernist literature seemed just as anarchic as the world it had sprung from. Early reviews of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* are testament to this.⁴

"*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" does more than simply reiterate that a dominant principle of the modernist world and its works of art was disorder, and with it chaos and anarchy. It turns this disorder into the organizing principle that all subsequent works of literature must follow:

In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him [. . .] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering,

4 Eliot addresses some of these reviews in his essay. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf likens Joyce's attempts to rethink the novel form as the "calculated indecency of a desperate man who feels that in order to breathe he must break the windows" (756). She compares Joyce to Eliot, both of whom, she argues, have spent so much strength "on finding a way of telling the truth, [that] the truth itself is bound to reach us in rather an exhausted and chaotic condition" (757). Quoted from Woolf (2000).

of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.⁵

As Eliot writes, the mythical method is “a step toward making the modern world possible for art . . .”⁶ If the point of all this is to elaborate an aesthetic that is apposite to modernity, then modernity demands an aesthetic that creates a form of order – as all art requires – while simultaneously reflecting the disorder of the times. But how can such a method create order while dramatizing disorder? Writers have found many solutions to this problem which do not necessarily involve the classical heritage.⁷ Our concern here, though, is why myth should be involved in one of these methods. A multitude of explanations has emerged: myth is sacred, it is communal, it appeals to a common tradition through recognizable narrative tropes and character types. One could go on of course. For our purposes, though, the focus will be on how myth can be used to turn disorder into an ordering principle.

Which is not to say that the modernist “mythical method” succeeds at ordering the disorder of contemporary history. For one, there are numerous “mythical methods” to speak of, not just across the spectrum of modernist literature, but even across the careers of individual modernist authors. This essay assesses what Eliot says myth is capable of doing when placed within new, modern contexts. In this way can we gauge why myth could have become so relevant to modernist literature as a whole, and to the idea of the modern world in general, to which modernist literature contributed no small part.

Background

Eliot’s review first appeared in the November 1923 edition of *The Dial*. After having been serialized in *The Little Review* since 1918, *Ulysses* finally appeared in book form in February of 1922. *The Waste Land* was first published not long after in *The Criterion* on 16 October. Eliot was reading *Ulysses* bit-by-bit as he was working on his great poem of modern desolation. Much of what Eliot argues in “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” finds its way into *The Waste Land*.

5 Eliot (1975), 177.

6 Eliot (1975), 178.

7 All the -isms of the avant-garde are attempts to do just this. From Symbolism to Dadaism to Soviet socialist realism, we find attempts at forming the literary arts into expressions of their particular context. Myth need not necessarily be a part of that.

Eliot thus had the question of how a work of art could maintain “a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” in mind long before he would formalize his ideas in his essay from 1923. Not only had he been reading *Ulysses* in serial form; not only had he been working on his own means of maintaining this parallel in *The Waste Land*, but he had the good fortune of experiencing the performance of such a parallel as part of an audience. In London in 1921 he saw a production of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*. In a subsequent review, he praised the work for its “quality of modernity” and wrote of the music that it

did seem to transform the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric cries of modern life; and to transform these despairing noises into music.⁸

Eliot himself likens the “quality of modernity” that Stravinsky’s music possesses to *Ulysses*.⁹ While Eliot here does not speak of any ordering narrative, the way he does of Joyce’s novel, he does praise the *The Rite of Spring*’s ability to simultaneously evoke the modern and the archaic by grafting the “barbarity” of modern life onto the structured form of music. What is key for Eliot though, and what separates his idea of how modern life should be transformed into art from what an avant-garde movement like Futurism has to say on the topic, is that the artwork does not just place the sounds of the modern city into a musical order, but that the music uses its ability to create order in such a way that it brings out the affinity between modern cacophony and archaic primitivism. “Antiquity” thus comes across as part and parcel of the experience of “contemporaneity.”

If the rhythm of the steppes has as much to do with the roar of the underground railway as the peregrinations of Odysseus do with the meanderings of a Dublin Jew in 1904 – or the plight of Procne and Philomela does with a London barmaid for that matter – then this can only be because there is something about these earlier, more “primitive” experiences and stories, that remains within our own contemporary experience of the world. It is more than just literary reference – at least, this is what Eliot will go on to argue in his review.

But why should these examples of mythic allusion differ from what came a century earlier? Why does myth function differently in, say, Tennyson than it

⁸ Eliot (2014), 370.

⁹ Eliot (2014), 369.

does in Yeats? In part, as Eliot himself says, it has to do with what happened in the fields of anthropology and psychology by the time we get to 1923. That Eliot was influenced by these fields is well known. Any reader who peruses *The Waste Land's* notes finds Eliot's nod to Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" pays a similar tribute: "Psychology [...] ethnology, and *The Golden Bough*," Eliot writes, "have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago."¹⁰ Thus, when we speak of the background to Eliot's ideas on the mythical method, we are speaking to an interest in myth that is at least as indebted to anthropology as it is to modernist reception.

I will have more to say on anthropology's influence on Eliot's ideas a little bit later. For now, I merely want to acknowledge its influence as we move on to a preliminary question. We know that Eliot considered the fields of psychology and anthropology to have made myth into an acceptable "method" for modern art. But what remains to be seen is why myth should be not just acceptable as a method, but "necessary."

Why Does Modernity Demand a 'Mythical' Method?

Many have argued that the various mythical methods of Eliot, Joyce and others were part of how modernism responded to its artistic forebears and historical moment. Pericles Lewis writes that a "reliance on myth" was one of the many formal innovations, such as stream of consciousness and poetic prose, that modernists used as a means of revitalizing the novel form.¹¹ This was, he argues, one way of reacting to nineteenth-century realism and naturalism. Jonathan Greenberg, meanwhile, echoes those critics who see the mythical method as a reaction against the anarchy of Futurism and other radical breaks in artistic form enacted by such figures as F. T. Marinetti, Wyndham Lewis, and even Ezra Pound.¹² Others, such as Theodore Ziolkowski, point to the need in the early 1920s for something reassuring and familiar. As he writes: "The revitalized turn to antiquity in the early twentieth century can be attributed directly to the fears preceding and subsequent effects of World War I, which generated an urgent search for principles of order to compensate for the chaos of the immediate pre- and postwar years."¹³ Thus, we have three ideas, which are not

¹⁰ Eliot (1975), 178.

¹¹ Lewis (2004), 4.

¹² Greenberg (2011), 42.

¹³ Ziolkowski (2008), 18.

necessarily mutually exclusive: myth as a means of 1) breaking away from literary predecessors 2) hedging on the more radical breaks made by other modernists, and 3) shoring up the fragments of a world falling away into chaos.

All of these ideas are plausible, even if there are objections to be had with each.¹⁴ What is certain, though, is that those who turned to myth did so as part of a perceived necessity. Modernism did not merely want to do something differently but believed that its historical circumstances demanded that things be done differently. We see this sentiment canonically expressed as far afield as Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto in 1909 and Eliot's comments in his review of *Ulysses*. Eliot had said something similar two years prior in his essay on the Metaphysical Poets:

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results.¹⁵

Virginia Woolf's "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," which she wrote in 1919 and delivered in 1924, presents perhaps the most canonical modernist take on this idea of necessity: "On or about December 1910 human character changed," she says.¹⁶ As a result, literature too must change. How so exactly? That depends on who is writing. Woolf's ideas are not Joyce's (after all, she called *Ulysses* "indecent").¹⁷ What is certain though, is that there is something about the contemporary moment that makes it more complex, more anarchic, and as a result, more disquieting than what came before. As we have seen, the catch word used to describe both the times and the literature that sought to reflect these times is oftentimes pretty straightforward: chaos.

"*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth", in fact, begins by referring to what earlier reviewers saw as the essentially "chaotic" nature of Joyce's novel. Note, though, that Eliot's review does not argue against this early criticism, at least not directly.

14 Ziolkowski himself acknowledges that the turn to myth seems counterintuitive considering that World War I exposed the extent to which the old guard of elites, who had been reared on the Greek and Roman classics, had directly marched the world to its ruin. (2008), 19.

Terry Eagleton, meanwhile, has argued that "the modernists' preoccupation with an ancient and underlying structure is at odds with their fascination with the chaos of a rapidly changing world." Quoted from Zajko (2004), 315.

15 Eliot (1975), 65.

16 Woolf (2000), 746.

17 Woolf (2000), 756.

He begins his essay as a response to Richard Aldington's recent review, which Eliot says "treated Mr. Joyce as a prophet of chaos" a charge which was not new.¹⁸ Valéry Larbaud's influential early review of *Ulysses* stresses the "structure" of the novel in part as a direct response to an earlier piece by Holbrook Jackson, which unapologetically labels *Ulysses* "a chaos."¹⁹ Like Larbaud, Eliot feels the need to counter this accusation, but he does not directly refute it. As he says, if *Ulysses* comes across as "formless" then there is a good reason for that, and it has all to do with our expectations from a novel, not from any weakness in Joyce's work. Eliot writes that if *Ulysses* is "more formless" than the novels of "a dozen clever writers," it is because these other writers are unaware of the extent to which the traditional novel form has become "obsolete": "If [*Ulysses*] is not a novel, that is simply because the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter."²⁰

Eliot does not directly counter Aldington's claim that Joyce is "a prophet of chaos," because what Eliot most objects to is not that Aldington calls the book chaotic but that he calls Joyce a "great undisciplined talent." Notice where Eliot places the emphasis. Eliot has no problem with this idea that the novel projects an idea of chaos. His problem is that others claim the book to be chaotic in its handling of the theme of chaos. For if the times are indeed chaotic, they demand that the modern writer project this chaos into his or her work. As Eliot says, in the creation of a work of art, "you are responsible for what you can do with material which you must simply accept."²¹

The novel, as it was then, says Eliot, died with Flaubert and James. This is because the forms that had been so relevant to their times no longer prove relevant to a civilization that comprehends such complexity and that is living through such anarchy. What we need is a new narrative method, says Eliot, or to put it differently, what we need is "myth": "Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward that order and form which Mr. Aldington so earnestly desires."²² Thus, the "mythical method" will make narrative art possible once again as a vehicle for depicting modernity. It is the form that depicts chaos without being overcome by it.

18 Eliot (1975), 175.

19 Slote (2009), 65.

20 Eliot (1975), 177.

21 Eliot (1975), 177.

22 Eliot (1975), 178.

The real question then is why myth. To fumble at some kind of answer, let us now take a look at what exactly is involved in a literary method that involves myth. Or to put it more precisely, let us examine what purpose myth can serve for a literary artist bent on depicting the futility and anarchy of contemporary history without falling prey to it.

What is This So-Called Mythical Method?

First and foremost, it is a means of establishing “order.” It does so by making spatial and temporal connections. Thus, the “method” functions in a manner not dissimilar to how allegory does (in a letter that preceded Eliot’s review by almost a year, Ezra Pound explicitly links Joyce’s methods in *Ulysses* to medieval allegory).²³ In allegory what is depicted is presented in a manner that links it to some pre-existing, known, structure. As a result a reader is forced to connect the wanderings of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus through Dublin to those of Odysseus and Telemachus across the Mediterranean. The simultaneity of this process is how order can be achieved. Or, as one critic puts it: “The mythical method solves the chaos-unity dilemma by allowing the co-existence of surface chaos and subsurface unity.”²⁴ The “surface chaos” is the depiction of chaotic modern life, while the “subsurface unity” is provided by the story of Odysseus. A “new” story about a couple of Dubliners thereby achieves “unity” through its connection to an identifiable story and its characters.²⁵

Of course, new questions arise. Unity with what exactly? To equate a contemporary narrative with a pre-existing one is not merely about unifying the contemporary story with its predecessor. It is about unifying the contemporary story with a certain set of values that its predecessor’s tale evokes. Greek myth occupies a foundational position in Western culture. Homer, in particular, is generally considered the starting point for narrative in the

23 See Pound (1985), 406.

24 Brooker (1989), 549.

25 The ability of the same mythic stories to apply across time periods and cultures is a topic that has found new vitality as of late through the work of evolutionary literary criticism. Lisa Zunshine seeks to account for this with a concept from cognitive evolutionary psychology and anthropology which recognizes our innate tendency to grant essences to things. Blakey Vermeule connects the portability of characters to the cognitive psychological concept of mind reading, while Brian Boyd refers to the way stories reinforce core values of groups.

See Zunshine (2008); as well as Vermeule (2010); and Boyd (2009).

Western world.²⁶ Therefore, the first value to speak of is quite simply that of prestige, and by this I mean a kind of literary prestige, what we could call an early form of cultural capital. From the *Aeneid* to the myriad medieval foundational romances associated with Troy on into the twentieth century, European and non-European literature alike have been connecting their own contemporary literatures to Homer's prestige. The particulars of this prestige and what it means to a contemporary writer's own work vary as one shifts contexts, and this is no different in modernism. Generally speaking though, we notice the ambivalent results of setting up a modern subject in connection with Homer. As William B. Worthen has noted, what happens is that the contemporary subject is simultaneously "dignified" and "diminished" through contrast, diminished in comparison with Homer, whose cultural significance was acquired over some three thousand years, and dignified because to set up such a contrast implies that the contemporary subject and its predecessor share a kind of symbolic structure.²⁷

Homer is doubly significant, though, because the *Odyssey* is both a classic of Western literature and a canonical version of a set of myths. The dignity of myth is part of Homeric literary prestige, but it brings with it a host of values that raises its significance beyond that of a literary classic. For as Rita Felski says, in perhaps the most succinct formulation of what myth does, "myth is culture masquerading as nature."²⁸

Which means that at one point in time a myth held a deeper – i.e., beyond just 'literary' or 'artistic' – significance to a certain community. Usually this significance is interpreted as religious, hence why many distinguish myth from fable by its early involvement with ritual. Myth though, is also remarkably fluid. The same myths transform as one traverses space and time. The result of this is that, as Dennis Donoghue writes, myth is a local truth that becomes perennial, eventually acquiring the status of wisdom.²⁹ Thus in pairing *Ulysses* with Bloom, the contemporary subject is forced into comparison with a series of values associated with literary prestige and mythic wisdom, the effect being a diminishing and a dignifying of the new in light of the old.

Pericles Lewis writes that the effect of these mythical patterns on the modernist text is to elevate the modern work's characters into figures of

26 As Harold Bloom famously said, "Everyone who now reads and writes in the West, of whatever racial background, sex or ideological camps, is still a son or daughter of Homer." See Bloom (1975), 33.

27 Worthen (1981), 173.

28 Felski (2009), 28.

29 Donoghue (1997), 214.

world-historical importance, in a way not dissimilar to what Dante does in *The Divine Comedy*.³⁰ Thus, the mythical method imbues the modern work with a set of values that traverse spatial boundaries, even as this work presents a narrative very much grounded in the particulars of the local, à la Joyce's Dublin. Likewise, the mythical method forces the contemporary subject into dialogue with its predecessor in a way that connects the presentness of the modernist text to the timelessness of the myth.³¹ The extent to which this method historicizes the myth depends upon whom you ask. There are those critics who argue that many modernists used myth as a means of evading secular time and history, while other critics say the opposite, and yet others delineate according to the author.³² David Spurr, for example, argues that Joyce's use of myth is historicized while Eliot's own methods place myth "apart from history."³³

One wonders how exactly a reliance on Homer then differs from a reliance on the Bible. In many ways it does not – in 1923, myth held a significance for Eliot that would later be filled by his reawakened Christianity. Yet, while both Western myth and the Judeo-Christian tradition are culturally significant to the West in a way that is both artistic and that goes beyond the aesthetic, the mythic tradition is by this point in Western history a secular one. Claudia Corti puts it nicely when she writes that myth survives as a type of value, a system recognized to all but no longer believed in.³⁴ As such, it seems particularly relevant to a world that has been "disenchanted of its gods," as Max Weber famously said of the period.³⁵

At the same time, to label the modernist period as secular has become something of a cliché, not to mention of an oversimplification. Scholars have begun to demonstrate just how relevant the Judeo-Christian heritage remained for many modernists.³⁶ Eliot represents perhaps the most obvious example of a writer for whom Christianity was most certainly not irrelevant to modernity.³⁷ At the same time, that myth could be flexible enough to appeal as much to a deeply observant Christian like Eliot as it did to writers who were decidedly

30 Lewis (2004), 49.

31 Preston has argued that Eliot's mythical method is merely a renaming of the "ancient and antimodern" practice of biblical typology. What Eliot was doing, she writes, falls within the tradition of early theologians, "who endorsed classical figures as typological prefigurations of Christian ideals." See Preston (2011), 16.

32 See Von Hendy (2001), 136.

33 Spurr (1994), 267.

34 Corti (1996), 148.

35 Kim, "Max Weber."

36 For example, see Lewis (2010).

37 See, for example, his most definitive statements on this subject: Eliot (1976).

less so, like Joyce, is testament to the tremendous flexibility of myth as a system of values.

I am using the term "flexibility" here in a particular way. For myth as a series of narratives has always been adaptable and open to modification. What I mean here has less to do with the structures of the stories and more to do with the values the modern idea of myth could summon. An educated European may have known Homer as well or (probably) better in 1800 than in 1900, but he or she certainly did not think of Homer in the same way. While theories and discoveries in the burgeoning fields of philology and archeology helped change how we think of the Homeric epics from a historical perspective, the even newer fields of anthropology and psychology began to affect our understanding of these epics from the perspective of myth. To call the *Odyssey* a set of myths meant something very different in 1923 than it did in 1823. In "*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*" Eliot writes that the field of psychology and works of anthropology like *The Golden Bough* "have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago."³⁸ Thus, if the mythical method is apposite to the modern experience, it is because of psychology and anthropology. Let us look at what these fields contributed to the modernist understanding of myth, at least, according to Eliot.

Anthropology and Psychology: Mythical Methods to be Emulated

Eliot's influences from anthropology are well documented, both by scholars and by Eliot, who pays tribute to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* in the footnotes to *The Waste Land* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in both his poem's footnotes and the review of *Ulysses*. The work of Weston and Frazer, not to mention that of Jane Harrison, Franz Boas, Émile Durkheim, and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, among others, had been rapidly transforming ideas of myth by the time Eliot sat down to review Joyce's novel. Factor in Sigmund Freud's writings – the Oedipus Complex is introduced in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899; *Totem and Taboo* appears in 1913 – and only then does one realize the tremendous emphasis being placed on the topic by the social sciences in the fifty-odd years prior to Eliot's essay. The methodologies of these writers influenced Eliot's conception of myth, and in so doing, helped to impart a series of values on the idea of myth that was far less formalized before Frazer, Weston and their ilk. If the mythical method was not possible before these thinkers, it is because myth was not previously thought of in the same way.

38 Eliot (1975), 178.

What Eliot had in mind when he conceived of his method was myth according to the methodology of Frazer and many of these early anthropologists. This methodology is quite simply one of comparison, “in which the myths and rituals of diverse peoples [...] are dramatically juxtaposed for the purposes of illustrating cultural similarities (and sometimes, cultural differences).”³⁹ In a sense then, the mythical method that simultaneously juggles contemporaneity and antiquity is really just the same methodology of cultural comparison that Frazer and others practiced, only translated anew for the purpose of revitalizing literary allusion. Frazer’s method was to seek out patterns across cultures and in so doing, force the myths of various communities into dialogue with each other. Frazer was also influenced by Charles Darwin. His work not only argues that cultures were linked through their early stories, but that these myths had evolved from primitive tales associated with rituals into more symbolic forms of narrative. Thus in juggling contemporaneity and antiquity with myth, a literary artist not only ties the contemporary subject to a mythic predecessor, but implies that the contemporary subject is part and parcel of a long trajectory of cultural evolution that connects the present moment to the entire prehistory of human storytelling.

Because of this, myth provides an author with a remarkably succinct means of imparting timeless and universal qualities upon his subject matter. However, it was not just about making connections across cultures in time; it was also about connecting the present moment to something buried below the strata of human consciousness, both on the cultural and the individual level. Which is why the other dominant value of myth that the social sciences promoted was one of recovery. If mythology dramatizes an aspect of life that is more universal, then this can only be because it seeks to get at a level of culture that is deeper.⁴⁰ It was Freud who made famous the idea that myths adumbrate society’s collective unconscious, that like our dreams, they are symbolic narratives that offer clues to our hidden pasts. But he was not alone in pressing this point. Lévy-Bruhl, whom Eliot read in 1914 while at Harvard, argued that myth was a “repressed element of modern consciousness.”⁴¹ To get at myth was thus to recover something long since hidden, both within ourselves and within our communities. Eliot says something similar when he writes that *The Golden Bough* can be read as an entertaining collection of myths, “or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation.”⁴²

39 Manganaro (2009), 81.

40 See Donoghue (1997), 209.

41 Spurr (1994), 270.

42 Eliot (2014), 370.

If myth is therefore something that moves across time from community-to-community, transforming and being transformed initially as a primitive element of human culture, then it is by definition an inchoate phenomenon. It speaks to the fluid nature of cultural and individual formation.⁴³ As such, myth is never complete. Even if it represents something fundamental about human identity that does not change drastically. One of the most popular ideas about myth for modernism was that it allows modern man to maintain a rapport with the “primitive” and/or “savage” within himself and within his culture. Recall that Eliot expresses a similar idea in his review of *The Rite of Spring* back in 1921. While the narrative of a myth may alter, its significance as a primordial aspect of human identity that is universal, despite its particularities, remains stable.

Now, primitivism per se, i.e., the ascribing of positive value on what is deemed archaic and thus less ‘civilized’ and less ‘rational,’ was not something Eliot promoted. One sees this sentiment advanced more by a D. H. Lawrence, which is part of the reason why isolating a single “mythical method” that applies across the board to modernism is so problematic. However, while Eliot may never have been a primitivist, the value of myth as a lens through which to tap into the primitive is something Eliot is citing when he speaks of ethnology and *The Golden Bough* making the modern world possible for art. Which is why primitivism is not one of the values that make Eliot’s mythical method valid for modernity, even if it is a consequence of the value of recovery, which is essential to Eliot’s idea of the mythical method.

The problem with recovery is that it is essentially backwards-looking. For a literature bent on “making it new,” as Ezra Pound famously said, what value does the recovery of the hidden past hold? Here an understanding of the difference between the kind of anthropology practiced by a Frazer and the kind practiced by a Weston proves useful. As Andrew Von Hendy discusses, modernism oftentimes misconstrued *The Golden Bough*’s message, which was not to celebrate the savage underpinnings of human culture but to laud civilization’s evolution out of magic and superstition and into the light of science and reason.⁴⁴ Too often Frazer’s work was grouped in with the likes of Weston, for whom the primitive vestiges of culture were a cause for celebration. If Frazer was a child of the Enlightenment who lamented the enduring influence of religion, then Weston was a spiritualist and a mystic.⁴⁵ Eliot himself paired these

43 This then contradicts Eagleton’s argument. See note 13 above.

44 Von Hendy (2001), 135.

45 Coyle (2009), 161.

two up in his notes to *The Waste Land*, but as Michael Coyle aptly puts it, in doing so, Eliot's poem suggests "that what defines modernism is the tension between Frazer's and Weston's positions."⁴⁶

The mythical method asserts that the primordial past is worthy of recovery, even if it does not legislate why that is. To a primitivist, this past represents something vital and positive that has been eroded over time by the "civilizing" bulldozer of modernity. To those less enamored with the "savage" in our collective unconscious, the recovery of myth is more about dramatizing the simultaneity of varying times and cultures through symbolic structures. Either way, myth appeals to a set of values that places it above the merely literary. Sacred to some and passé to others, myth cannot help but call to mind the continuum of human culture across communities and centuries. At least, it cannot help but do so now that the likes of a Frazer and a Weston have come along. So says Eliot.

With myth, then, we come as close as possible to juggling the urge to "make it new" with the necessity to ground one's literature in tradition. That myth can perform such an unwieldy task for a writer has to do with its nature as something fully formed and yet perpetually being reformed. It juggles between the present and the past, the local and the universal, because it is always reaching beyond itself. As it harks back to the primitive, it points forward in time to the long process of evolution and adaptation it has undergone. As it comments on specific cultures and communities, it simultaneously highlights structural similarities that tie it to "similar" myths in other cultures. Likewise, as it presents itself as a system of secularized symbolic narratives, it reminds us that the secular and the sacred are fluid concepts.

If myth achieves a kind of wisdom, it is because wisdom is a kind of knowledge that relies on belief. As such, it is the kind of knowledge that is incomplete and that depends on its incompleteness to maintain its identity. For wisdom that no longer needs that leap into the dark crosses the border into knowledge, and loses that mystic quality that defines it as something beyond the completely knowable. What underlies the relevance of the mythical method to modernity has to do with this, with the notion that myth is a kind of story that becomes wisdom, and thus, depends on incomplete knowledge. In this sense too can we think of myth as perpetually inchoate, and happily so.

46 Coyle (2009).

The Incomplete Knowledge of Myth

The concept of myth as a form of incomplete knowledge is also evident in another modernist work, though one that relies on a different mythical method: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912). The novella concerns a famous author named Gustav von Aschenbach who embarks on a holiday to Italy, where he encounters a Polish teenager named Tadzio. Aschenbach's early fascination with the boy's beauty soon gives way to obsession, to the point that Tadzio becomes a kind of idol for the German writer, an image of perfection. As an idol, Tadzio comes to take on Platonic ideals of beauty; he becomes a work of art, and his status in Mann's work is constantly balancing between that of mortal and god, reliant as much on the momentary nature of the boy's youthful charms as on the mythic quality of artistic beauty that transgresses death. Watching him from afar, as he does, Aschenbach compares the object of his veneration to Hyacinth, the beloved boy Apollo accidentally killed and then immortalized with the eponymous flower that sprang from his blood.

Just after Aschenbach makes this comparison, he proceeds to expatiate on the relationships of those who only know each other as strangers – Aschenbach spends most of the story admiring the boy's image from a comfortable distance. "Nothing is more bizarre," he says, than such a relationship. The participants feel something akin to "hysteria" as a result of their never being fully satisfied, even if "a tense mutual esteem" forms the basis of their connection: "For people love and honor someone as long as they cannot judge him, and yearning is a product of incomplete knowledge."⁴⁷

This passages equates myth with the reverence we have for those we admire from afar. For to mythologize someone is, in a sense, to rest content with knowing that person with the eyes alone. In a sense that, to know something as mythic, whether it is a person you desire or a story a community tells itself, is to take something out of the realm of the knowable. To mythologize is to force a permanent distance. Likewise, to participate in the dissemination of myth is to perpetuate the valorization of distance in storytelling. What one is dealing with is a desired impossibility, the impossibility that presents itself as aesthetic. As such, it is not static. It can adapt and change and be reinterpreted, but it can never be grasped.

The question that arises then is why this should be so pertinent to modernism? Or to put it another way, why does this aspect of myth-making, which is not exclusive to modernist aesthetics, make art "possible" in the modern

47 Mann (1998), 339.

world? I believe we can get at an answer by considering the irony that arises from considering myth along the lines of incomplete knowledge.

"Irony," because Eliot describes the "mythical method" as a quasi scientific means of establishing order. He writes that those who employ this method "will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations."⁴⁸ Never mind that the comparison is not apt. The point is not that Eliot's method is a science exactly, but that the method participates in the spread of knowledge by disseminating that which is perpetually being verified by posterity. If another writer who uses the "mythical method" is not imitating Joyce, it is because the method makes use of an understanding of myth, to which Joyce never enjoyed the exclusive rights. In a similar way, a physicist's work with the theory of general relativity dovetails off of a discovery Einstein elaborated, not off a creation he invented.

That such a comparison is at all not laughable has to do with the way the new social sciences were verifying supposed "truths" about the relationship of myth to culture. The irony of this is that any phenomenon that requires incomplete knowledge comes across as inherently un-scientific in nature, which is not to say anything controversial. After all, this was basically what the Enlightenment had to say about myth. Romanticism then fired back in objection, helping to rehabilitate the dignity of myth, hence why modernism's positive appraisal of myth oftentimes seems like a reworking of the Romantic legacy. What then should we make of modernism's well known embrace of both myth and science, since one could argue plausibly that the mythical legacy had as much an influence on modernist literature as did the emergence of new technologies and advances in such fields as physics and evolutionary theory?⁴⁹

Though even an interest in myth speaks to an interest in science. For Eliot, the "mythical method" is valid because of the new social sciences. To think of pre-modern storytelling as the evolution of ancient fertility rites is to imbue aspects of human experience with a kind of scientific formality. Another way of putting it is that the values Eliot seeks to connect to his mythical method are not divorced from scientific values, foremost among them being the confidence that one can get to know phenomena by studying their

48 Eliot (1975), 177.

49 The extent to which science and technology have been singled out for their influence on modernism can be gleaned by a quick glance at the many works on the subject. Recent examples include Henderson (2007) and Albright (2006).

component parts.⁵⁰ According to Eliot, the mythical method relates to science because its primary virtue is that it organizes the component parts of cultural history. Myth organizes the origins of human culture into recognizable narrative forms. As such, it provides a literary artist with the means by which to get at the macrocosm through the microscopic. This is especially important for a modernist, whose anarchic times threaten to sabotage his stories with unredeemable chaos. Myth allows a modernist to dramatize the essential of contemporary history by revealing to readers what is happening on the atomic level of daily experience. For a writer like Joyce working on a novel like *Ulysses*, which attempted to get as close as any work ever had to the minutiae of experience, this is no small tool with which to labor.

If myth can serve to organize the chaos of experience it is because it remains recognizable on the macrocosmic level despite the fact that the microcosmic details of the story change and grow as one moves from context to context. As Han Blumenberg has put it, myths are distinguished “by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation.”⁵¹ But it is more than about recognizing a basic story or character type. Though a myth may alter over time and across communities, its overarching values of transcendence and impermanence rest stable. Because it advertises its incompleteness, myth presents itself as perpetually open to revision when change is necessary. This is perhaps the core value of mythic structure, and it is a value we can connect to the scientific principle of peer review, the major difference being the extent to which old ideas quickly become obsolete when advances in science emerge. In myth, the new builds off the old without extinguishing it. The microcosmic elements grow and adapt to a changing world, which is nonetheless dramatized by a larger mythic narrative whose basic storyline is made to comment on the present through slight alterations in its details.

Myth advertise its incompleteness by promoting itself as wisdom, not as dogma or law.⁵² In this way can the mythical method be an artistic

50 The rise of a science of myth in the nineteenth century turned myth into a descriptive phenomenon that could also be reductive. Anthropology sought to describe the various myths around the world and, in the process, explain them (reduce them to certain principles, practices, tropes), while simultaneously using them to explain aspects of primitive culture (such as religious practices).

For a related discussion see Kennedy's analysis of mythos and logos (2006), 252.

51 Blumenberg (1985), 34.

52 Bell: “For modernist mythopoeia is a way of combining radical relativity with the apodictic nature of conviction.” (1997), 4. Bell argues that modernist myth-making allows

“scientific” method that nonetheless refuses to become natural or social law. As Blumenberg says, “myths are not ‘holy texts,’ which cannot be altered by one iota.”⁵³ Not that Judeo-Christian narratives have never been altered for the sake of aesthetics. But when an artist modifies the story of Adam and Eve, it is not the same as modifying the story of Prometheus. To modify the former is to alter what has always been perceived as essential to the story. To modify the latter is to participate in what has always been deemed essential to that story: adaptation being part and parcel of what makes myth so relevant across space and time.⁵⁴ Art does not tolerate rigid formalities for long, especially if the movement indoctrinating these structures is one that defines itself in part according to its rejection of previous rules.

But how does this tie in with disorder? Which is another way of reiterating our problem: Why is myth particularly relevant to modernism?

Transcendence and impermanence contradict each other. To transcend means to be above and beyond the reach of that which is impermanent. Myth is an interesting animal in that it retains both traits. It transcends the community it arose from by being fundamentally amenable to change. As such it creates order out of the disorderly passing of time. It provides a structure upon which culture constructs its narratives. Change need not be conceived of as disorderly. After all, the dominant European narrative up to the twentieth century was one of progress towards Enlightenment – as *The Golden Bough* asserts. But in the modernist period, as this narrative started to be challenged, in particular as a result of the devastation of World War I, change starts to seem much less orderly. The result is that the present moment seems a chaos, a “difficult” place where futility seems to reign where progress once did. Is this an oversimplification? Of course it is. But then Eliot’s comment on the “panorama of futility and anarchy” is one of the most famous oversimplifications in modern literary history. This does not mean that it lacks any semblance of truth though either. For writers bent on presenting radical breaks in literary form as the necessary consequence of the chaos of contemporary history, the only kind of order that is tenable is one that advertises its own disorder. And myth, which is disorderly in its mutability, in the values that stick to it like so much window dressing,

the modern artist to work with certainty without shirking the uncertainty of modern relativism.

53 Bell (1997), 4.

54 This topic is of course more complicated than how I present it here. After all, the Pentateuch is a series of oral tales collected over time. The issue is one of canonization. Whereas Greek myth loses its status as truth in Western culture, the Hebrew Bible does not to the same extent.

is nothing if not the kind of ordering principle that disorders the very value of order itself. Or to put it another way, in myth disorder acquires its own special brand of dignity.

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Index

- Achilles 186, 191, 192, 195n54, 220, 255
See also Homer
- Acropolis 10, 11n33, 23n11, 277–279
- Aeneas 58, 70, 156, 183n8, 194, 194n52
See also Virgil
- Aeschylus 93, 126n13, 247, 274
- Aetna, Mount 25
- Ajax 101n57, 284
- Alcibiades 279, 279n46
- Aldington, Richard 40, 43n15, 45, 50, 298
- Alexandria Egypt 1, 7–8, 23, 39, 43, 46,
48–50, 136, 269, 287
- Algeria, 247n35
- Allegory 14, 23–24, 29, 33–36, 200, 205, 221,
299, 301n31
- Almeida, Teresa de Sousa 124, 140
- Amazons 28, 35, 93
- Andrić, Ivo 75, 75n, 79–82, 99, 101
- Andromache 189, 274–275, 277–279
- Anon, Charles Robert 126n13
- Anouilh, Jean 162
- Apollinaire, Guillaume 78n15, 143, 164, 167,
167n21, 167n23, 171, 171n40
- Apollo 43, 76, 88, 94, 101, 131, 138, 169, 263,
284, 306
- Archambault, Paul 263
- Aristogeiton: *See* “Harmodios and
Aristogeiton”
- Arconada, César M. 117
- Aristotle 6, 11–112, 135n48, 183n6, 199,
199n3, 204n21, 220–228, 230, 230n46,
233–234, 237, 237n76, 243
- Arnold, Matthew 129
- Artaud, Antonin 162–163, 165, 171, 174
- Arthur, King 192
- Asia Minor Catastrophe 8, 278–281, 284,
288
- Athena 23, 23n11, 124–125, 131–132, 137, 140
- Athenaeum* 131
- Aub, Max 109
- Auden, W. H. 270, 273
- Augustine, Saint 183n8, 242–243, 247, 256
- Augustus, Octavian (Gaius Julius
Octavius) 80
- Aurelius, Marcus 129n23, 247, 247n35, 265
- Babbitt, Irving 217n78
- Babić, Ljubo 79
- Babylon (personification) 23
- Bacarisse, Mauricio 109
- Bacchantes 177–178
- Bacchus, Bacchae, *see* Dionysus
- Bacon, Henry 183n7
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 183n7
- Bakst, Leon 164
- Ballets Russes 163, 163n11, 164
- Balzac, Honoré de 131, 140
- Bansat-Boudon, L. 174
- Barney, Stephen 186
- Bartholdi, Frédéric-Auguste 30–31, 35
- Baudelaire, Charles 3n7, 131
- Bayle, Pierre 242
- Bearden, Romare 12n37
- Beauvais, Yann 174–5
- Benn, Gottfried 84
- Bergson, Henri 74n3, 78n16, 183n7
- Bešević, Stevan 77–8
- Bhagavad Gita* 12
- Boas, Franz 302
- Boccaccio, Giovanni 186–187
- Boccioni, Umberto 9n29
- Bojić, Milutin 77
- Boorsch, Jean 160
- Borgal, Clément 165
- Borges, Jorge Luis 107n2
- Boulevard du Temple 168n30
- Bowra, C. M. 170
- Breton, André 99n55, 164–5, 171, 171n40,
177, 179, 254
- Briseida 186
- Briseis 186
- Britannia (personification) 24
- Brook, Peter 162
- Browning, Robert 38, 56, 59, 64n33,
126n12
- Brutus, Trojan 192, 194
- Bryn Mawr College 42
- Buber, Martin 79
- Büchner, Georg 168
- Buñuel, Luis 162, 162n8
- Butts, Mary 183

- Byron, Lord (George Gordon) 126n12
 Byzantine 6, 182, 196, 272
- Caeiro, Alberto 124, 130, 132, 135–137, 139–140
 Calcas 186
 Calchas 188, 190
 Campos, Álvaro de 124, 130
 Campos, Haroldo de 132
 Camus, Albert 15, 220, 242–265
 Caligula 243–263
 L'Envers et L'endroit 248
 L'État de Siège 248
 L'Étranger 248
 "Helen's Exile" 243, 247, 256n83
 Myth of Sisyphus/Le Mythe de Sisyphé 243, 249–251
 "Nuptials at Tipasa" 246, 247–248
 La Peste/The Plague 248
 Pied noir 243
 Rebel, The/L'Homme Révolté 243, 244, 250–251, 254, 264
 "Return to Tipasa" 260
 "Wind at Djemila" 247–248
- Carlyle, Thomas 126n12
 Carné, Marcel 168n 30
 Casares, Maria 170
 Cassandra 189, 191
 Cassirer, Ernst 237
 Catalonians 196
 Catholicism 165, 167n21, 171, 174, 217n77
 catoptric anamorphism 176, 179
 Catullus 40
 Cavafy, C. P. 1, 4–8, 11–2, 15–16, 269–270, 272–273, 275–276, 287
 Céfalas, Constantino 127n15
 Centaur 21, 95–6
 Chanel, Gabrielle "Coco" 160, 163
 Chaucer, Geoffrey 63, 186–188
 Cherniss, Harold 237
 Chesterton, G. K. 126n12
 Chirico, Giorgio de 171–172
 Chryseis 186
 Claire, Roma 126n12
 Clayton, Barbara 184n9
 Clement of Alexandria 48
 Cocteau, Jean 14, 161–179, 183n7
 L'Ange Heurtebise 170
 Antigone 161, 163, 164
 Autoportrait sans visage < cubist > 175
 La Belle et la Bête 161
 L'Homme invisible 175
 La Machine Infernale 161, 163
 Orphée (film) 161
 Orphée (theatre) 161, 162, 163, 164–173, 176
 Le Sang d'un poète 160, 162, 167, 173–177
- Coelho, António Pina 126n12, 126n13, 135, 135n48
 Coelho, António Prado 140
 Cohen, Hermann 237
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 126n12
 Colosseum 10
 Colossus 19–35
 Columbia (personification of America) 24
 Communism 107, 179
 Conrad, Joseph 53–56
 Coriolanus 183n8
 Corpus Christi 23
 Côte d'Azur 165
 Cressida 185–189
Criterion, The 217, 294
 Crnjanski, Miloš 75, 78–79, 82–87, 96, 99, 101, 104–105
 Cromer, Earl of 127n19
 Cuba 19–36
 independence from Spain 19–20, 25–26
 personified 19–21, 24–27, 31–36
 relations with United States 26, 33
 Cubism 175
 Cybele 193–194
 Cyclops, Cyclopes 20, 25–28, 29, 30, 35
- Dadaism 74n4, 106, 164, 172, 217, 217n72, 294n7
 Dalí, Salvador 162n 8
 Daniel, Arnaut 57–59, 62
 D'Annunzio, Gabriele 130
 Dante, Alighieri 12n37, 46, 54, 56–57, 56n10, 59–61, 63, 65–66, 70, 150, 154, 154n32, 154n33, 155, 155n35, 199, 301
 Divine Comedy 12n37, 66, 150, 301
 Dares Phrygius 186, 195–6
 Darío, Rubén 3n7, 21, 34, 34n44
 Darwin, Charles 303
 Dea Roma 27, 29, 35
 De Bouilly, Solomon Monny 75, 98–99

- Decadence 7, 49, 124, 127–130, 132, 139, 142, 259
- De Carolis 130
- Delphi 43, 254
- Demeter 23, 184, 261
- Derrida, Jacques 224–225, 234–237, 243
- Dešković, Branko 79
- dharma 174
- Diaghilev, Serge 163–164
- Dial, The* 292, 294
- Díaz Fernández, José 109
- Dictys Cretensis 186, 195
- Diomedes 186–187, 190–192
- Dionísio, João 126n13
- Dionysus 112–113, 167, 171, 177
- Divus, Andreas 61n22, 53–56, 68
- Dobson, J. F. 126n13
- Domenchina, Juan José 109
- Don Juan 265
- Donne, John 126n12
- Doolittle, Hilda: See “H. D.”
- Dornis, Jean 77
- Drainac, Rade (Radojko Jovanović) 75, 79, 98–100
- Dreyer, Carl 165
- Droysen, Johann Gustav 48
- Drunkenness 113–5
- Duchamp, Marcel 163, 172
- Dudo of St. Quentin 192
- Durban, South Africa 126, 132
- Durkheim, Émile 302
- Eagleton, Terry 34, 175–176, 297n14, 304n43
- Einstein, Albert 307
- Eleusinian Mysteries 171
- Eleusis 23
- Elgin Marbles 39
- Eliot, T. S. 1–2, 4–8, 10–12, 15–16, 46, 53–60, 66, 108–110, 121, 125, 183–184, 217, 217n76, 269–72, 275, 292–310
- “Metaphysical Poets” 297
- “Tradition and the Individual Talent” 15, 144n5
- “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” 292–310
- Use of Criticism and the Use of Poetry, The* 217n80
- Waste Land, The* 1, 4, 8, 53, 54, 56, 58–60, 66, 183n8, 292–293, 295–296, 302, 305
- Elizabethans 126
- Ellis, Havelock 133
- Elytis, Odysseus 16
- Empson, William 182n3
- English Poems I–II* 127n17
- Enlightenment, The 175, 185n13, 304, 307, 309
- Epicureanism 130, 132, 137
- Epigram 127, 131–132
- Erato 182, 185
- Espina, Antonio 110–114
- Eteocles 274
- Euripides 44, 275–288
- Eurybates 195
- Eurydice 184
- Evolutionary criticism 299n25
- Exoticism, 124
- Fascism 111–115, 117
- Fitzgerald, Edward 132
- Flack, Leah Culligan 184n9
- Flaubert, Gustave 298
- Fletcher, John Gould 40
- Flint, F. S. 40
- Foretić, Vinko 79
- Franco, Francisco 197
- Frazer, Sir James George 296, 302–305, 309
- Freud, Sigmund 169, 171, 171n40, 183n7, 202, 207–208, 214, 216, 302–303
- Friedmann, Elizabeth 185n14, 197
- Futurism 9, 9n27, 38–39, 79n, 100, 106, 142, 295–297
- Gadamer, Hans Georg 225, 230–234, 236–237
- Gaia 25
- Gaiser, Konrad 227
- Galileo Galilei 171
- Gallop, Jane 176–177
- Gance, Abel 165
- Garnet, L. M. J. 126n1
- Garnett, Richard 127n17
- Genet, Jean 161
- Geoffrey of Monmouth 192–193, 194n52
- Germania (personification) 24
- giants 19–36
- Gibbon, Edward 129

- Gide, André 242, 246, 263, 283, 283n60, 287n79
gigantes, gigantes (Spanish processional figures) 23
 Gilfillaw, George 126n12
 Gilgamesh 27
 Gilman, Charlotte Perkins 187
 Giménez Caballero, Ernesto 115
 Giradoux, Jean 162
 Gnosticism 243, 256
 Gongora, Luis de 288
 Goya, Francisco 21
 Granada personified 33
 Graves, Robert 182
 The Anger of Achilles: The Iliad 183n4
 Claudius the God 182
 Count Belisarius 182
 The Golden Fleece 183n4
 The Greek Myths 183n4
 Hercules, My Shipmate 183n4
 Homer's Daughter 183n4
 I, Claudius 182
 The Siege and Fall of Troy 183n4
 Graves, Robert and Laura Riding
 Epilogue 182n3, 185n13
 A Pamphlet Against Anthologies 182n3
 A Survey of Modernist Poetry 182n3
 Greece, Greeks 185, 186, 190, 192, 193, 194, 196
 Greek Anthology 44, 124–125, 127n15, 131–132
 Greek Civil War 274–5
 Greek Ideal 123–125, 127–129, 131, 133–135
 Grenier, Jean 246, 263
 Gutkind, Erich 79

 Hadrian 131
 Hallam, Henry 126n12
 Hardy, Thomas 22n9
 Harmodios and Aristogeiton 280–283, 287–288
 Harrison, Jane 302
 H. D. 14, 23n9, 38–50, 55n4, 57n13, 60n21, 183–184
 Hector 191, 194, 274–275, 277–279
 Hecuba 188, 275, 284
 Heidegger, Martin 15, 183n7, 220–224, 236–237, 243, 257

 Helen of Troy 184–186, 189–192, 280, 282–288
 Heliogabalus 172
 Henryson, Robert 187
 Hephaestus 25
 Heraclitus 166
 Hermes 114–116
 Herodotus 273, 279–280
 Hesiod 25
 heteronyms 124, 126, 135, 137, 139–40
 Hissarlik 196
 Hittite 194
 Homer 2, 11–12, 26, 46, 49, 54, 60–61, 63–65, 68, 70, 129, 169, 183n8, 188, 271–272, 274, 277–280, 285, 287, 299–300, 302
 Iliad 186, 195
 Odyssey 12n37, 26, 61, 63, 65n35, 69, 169, 292–293, 299–300, 302
 See also Odysseus
 Honegger, Arthur 163
 Horace 138
 Hulme, T. E. 183n7
 Huysmans, J. K. 133
 Hyland, Drew 234–236

 Imagism 38–40, 47
 Ionesco, Eugène 160
 Irigaray, Luce 224
 Isis (Egyptian goddess) 23
 Italia (personification) 24

 Jackson, Holbrook 298
 James, Henry 298
 Jarnés, Benjamín 109, 118–119, 120
 Jarry, Alfred 171
 Jonson, Ben 126n12
 Jouvett, Louis 162–163
 Joyce, James 2, 22n9, 40, 55n4, 56, 57n13, 59n17, 59n18, 60n21, 70, 78, 183n7
 Finnegans Wake 60n21, 217n72
 Ulysses 4, 56, 58, 60n21, 292–99, 302, 308
 Joyce, Stanislaus 78
 Júdice, Nuno 124
 Jungian psychology 169

 Kandinsky, Wassily 79
 Kant, Immanuel 175, 227n29, 236–237
 karma 174

- Karsavina, Tamara 164
 Keats, John 126n12
 Khayyám, Omar 132
 Klein, Jacob 225n20, 228n38
 Krämer, Hans Joachim 225–229, 237n79

 Lacan, Jacques 176–177, 179
 Lampus 189
 Lang, Andrew 49, 127n19
 Laodice 189
 Laplanche, Jean 177n57
 Larboard, Valéry 298
 Lasker-Schüler, Else 87
 Lautréamont, Comte de (Isidore-Lucien Ducasse) 171
 Lawrence, D. H. 40, 304
 Lazarević, Branko 76–77
 Leaf, William 185n14
 Leda 184
 Leighton, Frederick 133
 Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien 302–303
 Lewis, C. S. 14, 199–218
 Lewis, Wyndham 183n7, 296
 Lind, Georg 129
 Li Po 70
 Lisbon 127n17, 130, 134–135
 Lisle, Leconte de 130
Little Review, The 294
 Lively, Genevieve 184n9
 Livingston, R. W. 126n13
 Livius, Titus 98
 London 1, 40, 101, 194, 283, 295
 Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth 126n12
 Longinus 286–288
 Lowell, Amy 40
 Lowell, J. R. 126n12
 Lucretius 166
 Lysander 276

 Machairas, Leontios 273
 Mackail, J. W. 127n19
Mahabharata 174
 Mallarmé, Stéphane 87
 Mallorca 182, 196–197
 Malraux, André 242
 Mann, Thomas 306
 Manojlović, Todor 75, 78–79, 87–90, 99
 Man Ray 163
 Marat, Jean-Paul 171

 Marc Antony 183n8
 Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso 9, 101, 296–297
 See also Futurism
 Maritain, Jacques 165–166
 Martí, José 13, 19–35
 Martin, Younghee-Choi 12n37
 Marvell, Andrew 126n12
 Massine, Léonide 164, 168n27
 Matić, Dušan 79
 Matriushka 162n7
 Meleager 44
 Melos, “Melian dialogue” 277
 Merlin 192
 Metaxas, Ioannis 274
 Miller, Lee 173
 Milton, John 126n12, 166–167
modernismo 3n7, 13, 19, 21–22, 24, 34–36
 Mommsen, Theodor 43
 Montaigne, Michel de 242, 257
 Monteiro, Adolfo Casais 124, 134–135
 Monteiro, George 131
 Mora, Antóni 130
 Murdoch, Iris 269
 Murray, Gilbert 126n13, 276
 Mussolini, Benito 66–68, 71, 247
 myth/mythology 24–26, 28–29, 34, 107–108,
 110, 114–115, 118–119, 120
 anthropological studies of 296, 302–305,
 308n50
 science, as a 307–310, 308n50

Nación, La (newspaper) 29
 neopaganism 129, 130, 135, 140
 Neo-Platonism 243, 247, 256
 Nero 171
 New York City 5, 29–30
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 129, 223, 227n30,
 236–237, 243–244, 246–247, 250–251,
 257
 Nihilism 107, 120
 Nijinsky, Vaslav 164
 Nikopoulos, Luca 317

 Obregón, Antonio de 110, 114–115
 ode, Greek 124–126, 128, 130–131, 137–140
 Odysseus 4, 26, 60–64, 67–69, 195–196
 See also Homer
 Oedipus 161, 163, 255, 261, 262, 274–275
 Olisipo 127n17

- Orpheus 162, 165, 166–167, 177
 Ortega y Gasset, José 109, 111, 118
 Othryoneus the Hittite 193
 Ouranos 25
 Ovid 12, 55, 57, 80, 88, 98, 157n38, 166, 169, 183n8

 Païni, Dominique 160, 166, 175
 paganism 127, 129–130, 133–137
 Palacio Valdés, Armando 106
Palatina Anthology 127n15
 Pamuk, Orhan 5, 287n79
 pansexuality 131
Parade 164, 167, 167n22
 Paris (city) 64–65, 78, 78n15, 78n16, 79n, 99n55, 163–165, 167n22, 167n24, 168, 168n30, 174, 242, 243, 246, 278
 Paris (Trojan prince) 190, 191
 Pastor, José F. 114
 Pater, Walter 129–130
 Paton, W. R. 127n19, 132
patria 19–21, 25–27, 30–31, 33, 35–36
 Pericles 274
 Persian Wars 276
 Pessoa, Fernando 14, 123–137, 139–140
 “Antinoo” 127n17, 130–131
 “Cancioneiro” 124
 “Epithalamium” 130–131
 “Inscriptions” 124, 131–132
 Petronius 54–5, 183n8
 Petrović, Rastko 75, 79, 90–98, 99, 101
 Philoctetes 192
 Phoenicians 196
 Picasso, Pablo 79, 161, 163–164, 173, 183n7
 Pike, E. R. 126n12
 Pirandello, Luigi 283
 Pitoëff, Serge 164
 Plato 6, 48, 74n3, 135n48, 199–218, 220–237, 243, 261, 279
 Platonism 14–15, 136, 220–225, 227–229, 234–237, 306
 Phaedrus 209–212
 Republic 205, 206, 208
 Symposium 202–208
 Plotinus 243
 Poe, Edgar Allan 126n12
 Polynices 274
 Poupidou Center 160, 175

 Pontalis, Jean-Baptiste 177n57
 Pound, Ezra 4, 8, 14, 34, 38, 40, 43n15, 44, 45, 46, 50, 53–71, 183, 271, 272n14, 296, 299, 304
 “A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste” 38, 40, 50
 Cantos, The 4, 53–54, 56–58, 60–61, 63, 65–66, 69–70
 Des Imagistes 40
 “In a Station of the Metro” 40
 pre-Socratics 135
prestidigitateur 167n4
 Priam 186, 188–192, 194n52, 284
 primitivism 34, 295, 304–305
 Princip, Gavril 82
 Prometheus 76, 116, 243, 254, 261–262, 309
 Proust, Marcel 131

 Quasimodo, Salvatore 14, 142–157

 Radiquet, Raymond 164
Ramayana 174
 Ransome, A. 126n12
 realism 294n7
 Rebelo, Luís de Sousa 123, 124, 126–130, 134–135
 Reis, Ricardo 124, 130, 137–40
 République, La (personification) 24
 Riding, Laura 14, 182–197
 Anarchism Is Not Enough 185n13
 The Close Chaplet 185
 Collected Poems 185n13
 Contemporaries and Snobs 182n3
 Lives of Wives 183
 A Trojan Ending 182–3, 185, 186n15, 187–8, 191, 193, 195, 196, 197
 Voltaire: A Biographical Fantasy 185n13
 The Word Woman 194n50
 The World and Ourselves 197
 Riding, Laura and Robert Graves
 Epilogue 182n3, 185n13
 A Pamphlet Against Anthologies 182n3
 A Survey of Modernist Poetry 182n3
 Rilke, Rainer Maria 166–7, 183n7
 Rimbaud, Arthur 171
 Robertson, J. M. 126n12
 Robespierre, Maximilien 171
 Roman Empire 130, 131, 192, 196
 Romanticism 38, 126, 307

- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel 126n12
 Rouse, W. H. D. 127n19
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 171

 Sade, Alphonse Donatien, Marquis de 171
 Sainte-Maure, Benoît de 186
 Sánchez Rivero, Ángel 108
 Sappho 39–40, 44, 46, 49–50, 152–153, 184
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 220, 243
 Satie, Eric 161, 163–164
 Scamander, Scamandrius 194, 284–285
 Schadewaldt, Wolfgang 226–228, 230
 Schiller, Friedrich 287
 Seferis, George 1–2, 4–8, 12, 15–16, 269–288
 Segal, Charles 166
 Sena, Jorge de 127n17, 131, 140
 sensationism 129, 130, 135
 Shakespeare, William 12, 63, 126, 126n12, 186–188, 188n23
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe 126n12, 217n80
 Silva, Alberto da Costa e 130
 Snorri Sturluson 192
 Sommer, Doris 26–27
 Sophocles 23, 63, 183n8, 247
 Stadler, Ernst 87
 Statue of Liberty 19, 29–31, 34–35
 Stein, Gertrude 217, 217n72
 Stesichorus 280
 stoicism 132, 135, 137, 243
 Strachey, Lytton 126n12
 Strauss, Leo 225–8, 230n43, 234, 236n71
 Stravinsky, Igor 161, 163, 183n7, 295, 304
 Le Sacre du Printemps 163n11
 Oedipus Rex 161, 163
 Petrushka 163n11
 Surrealism 75n4, 99, 99n55, 162n8, 163–165, 167, 167n23, 171–174, 179, 217, 217n72, 254
 symbolism 124, 126n12, 164–165, 167n23, 171–173, 179, 294n7
 Symonds, John Addington 126–127, 131

 Tantalus 119
 Tartarus 25–26, 119n43
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord 295
 Teucer 284
 Théâtre des Arts 164
 Théâtre du Châtelet 162n11
 Theocritus 49

 Thomism 165
 Thracians 166
 Thucydides 15, 263, 269–288
 Tiresias 60, 62–64, 183n8
 Titans 25
 Tolkien, J. R. R. 205n26, 213, 213n56, 218n81
 Tolstoy, Leo 263
 Tomson, G. R. 127n19
 Torre, Guillermo de 107
 Trakl, Georg 87
 Trent, W. 126n12
 Troilus 186, 187, 188, 189, 191, 192, 193
 Trojan War 186–187, 192, 195–197
 Troy 182, 185, 188, 189–194, 196, 274–276, 278–280, 284
 Tübingen School 225, 227–230, 237

 Ulysses (Greek hero): See Odysseus
 Unamuno, Miguel de 106

 Venizelos, Eleftherios 272, 279
 Venus de Milo 22n9
 Victorians 126–7, n12, 129, 131–133
 Vieira, Yara Frateschi 124, 131
 Vigo, Jean 162
 Villefranche-sur-Mer 165
 Vinaver, Stanislav 73–75, 78–79, 99
 Virgil 54–55, 57–58, 166, 169, 193
 Aeneid 55, 77, 156, 193–194, 300
 Vitrac, Roger 163
 Vlastos, Gregory 232n56, 237n72

 Walcott, Derek 12n37
 Warner, Rex 272, 286
 Wayang kulit 174
 Weber, Max 301
 Weston, Jessie L. 296, 302–305
 Wilde, Oscar 126, 129, 131
 Williams, James S. 164
 Williams, Tennessee 167
 Williams, William Carlos 40
 Woolf, Virginia 3n7, 293, 293n4, 297
 World War I 14, 39, 75, 77, 78–79, 80, 82n25, 98–99, 106–107, 142, 164, 220, 236–237, 296–297, 309
 World War II 3, 85–86, 101, 142, 145n8, 163n11, 224–225, 249, 259, 270, 274

Xenophon 82, 276
Ximénez de Sandoval, Felipe 109
Yeats, W. B. 183n7, 296

Zeus 25, 194
Zion (personification) 23
Zola, Émile 242
Zombie(s) 21, 24–26, 30, 33